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REMARKABLE ROGUES

MARIE TARNOWSKA ON TRIAL

REMARKABLE ROGUES

THE CAREERS OF SOME NOTABLE CRIMINALS OF EUROPE AND AMERICA

BY CHARLES KINGSTON

WITH EIGHT ILLUSTRATIONS

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PREFACE

That interest in crime and the criminal is universal no one will deny. In a cruder age it was the custom to organize parties to witness the public execution of notable scoundrels—Monckton Milnes (Lord Houghton) took Thackeray and, I believe, Dickens, to see Courvoisier's—but nowadays we are more decorous, although on occasion several thousand persons can assemble outside a prison and stare at a blank wall during a private hanging inside. Most of us, however, are content to behold crime through the eyes of our favourite journal and it is impossible to complain that the press does not cater fully for us in this respect. That crime retains its fascination for high and low is proved almost every time there is a sensational trial at the Central Criminal Court, for the attendance invariably includes distinguished politicians, authors, artists and representatives of that nebulous class termed "Society." It is, however, no longer possible for a special box to be erected at the Old Bailey to enable members of the Royal Family to watch a man on trial for his life, and it is now bad form for a "popular judge" to surround himself with princes and peers and audibly keep them *au fait* with the evidence. These things have passed away and we have "headlines" and contents-bills in their place. We are, in fact, more respectable if less robust, but sin and sinners will intrigue us to the end of Time.

James Greenacre, was the subject of more than one pamphlet biography, but I have preferred to go to the copious reports of his trial for my material, and I consulted similar sources whenever possible before writing

the chapters dealing with Marie Tarnowska, Mrs. Leroy Chadwick, Jeanne Daniloff, three of my German criminals and several others. Greenacre's trial and execution were conducted on typical early nineteenth century lines, and that loathsome scoundrel was nearly elevated to the pinnacle of a hero by indiscriminate publicity. The competition to be present in Court when he was in the dock was so keen that a pound a head was charged for admission to the gallery on each day and even at that price the queue was always greater than the accommodation. After his conviction he was visited in prison by scores of "noblemen and gentlemen," and while in a contemporary account of the execution—which I quote—the reporter omits the names of those eminent persons who attended it, it is significant that the number of private carriages, according to another journalist, should have exceeded fifty.

I obtained from an American detective who knew Adam Worth many of the details of that rogue's doings, and it is to an American newspaper of the late sixties that I am indebted for particulars of Belle Star's career. Marie Tarnowska told her own story to Madame A. Vivanti Chartres, who sympathetically transferred the countess's *apologia* to paper and published it. As a human document it is very interesting but it is not convincing, and the very full report of her trial at Venice published in the press of this country is the only reliable guide to an understanding of the case. M. Canler, the famous French detective, first related in narrative form the incidents which lead to the three arrests of the murderers of Madame Houet, and I consulted the French and English papers for the history of Pierre Voirbo's crime. "Madame Rachel" was tried three times and there were several special reports at the disposal of the author, but she does not seem to have attracted much notice since her death and an account of her life will be new to most of my readers.

REMARKABLE ROGUES

CHAPTER I

A RUSSIAN DELILAH

ONE day in a Russian country-house a girl of sixteen was presented to three men—a prince, a baron, and a count, and as she greeted them with youthful enthusiasm and *camaraderie* she was quite unconscious of the fact that each of the three had asked her father for her hand.

In the land of the steppes, girls develop quickly, and although Marie was very young in years she was a fully-matured beauty, tall, with fine features, a beautiful complexion, a divine voice, and enough charm for half a dozen ordinary women.

No wonder the men were in love with her—she captured all hearts with her beautiful face and her musical voice—and when she had to be told of the proposals her father informed her that she could choose between the prince and the baron, for he disapproved of the count.

"I should love to be a princess," Marie cried romantically.

Old Count O'Rourke, a typical Russian nobleman, who was descended from an Irish soldier, was gratified.

"I am happy to hear you say so," he exclaimed, and kissed her.

A year later Marie eloped with the count, the one man of the three she had been warned against.

It was the beginning of a series of tragedies for the

extraordinary girl, who became an even more extraordinary woman. Her father promptly closed his doors against her once she was the Countess Tarnowska. Marie declared that she did not care, adding that her husband was the most perfect lover in the world and she was the happiest wife that ever lived. But within six months she had changed her mind.

"God help me!" she murmured to a consoling friend. "I did not know there could be so much sorrow in the world." For in that short time she had discovered that Vassili Tarnowska was a libertine and that she was only one of many women he had professed to love.

From that moment Marie became a different creature. Always high-spirited and highly-strung, she only required a feeling of injustice to influence her to take to the path that leads to perdition.

Her husband neglected her, and she could not bear to be alone. Other men flocked round her and talked lyrically of her exquisite beauty. The neglected wife eagerly welcomed these compliments. Of course she and her husband, as members of the Russian aristocracy, had to maintain outwardly an appearance of perfect amity, but they were rapidly drifting apart, and tragedy was hovering over them all the time.

What would have happened had Marie found a strong and loving husband one can only conjecture. That she was born with a "kink" in her brain is evident. She has since confessed to that, and more than one specialist has recorded that she inherited disease as well as life from her parents and that she was not always responsible for her actions. But it has to be admitted that when she began to carve out a career for herself independently of her husband and children she permitted no scruple, no sense of honour, and no decency to interfere with her in her mad pursuit of pleasure.

The first of her victims was her husband's brother. Peter Tarnowska was a quiet, intellectual youth with

a great reverence for womenfolk. He admired his sister-in-law, and was under the impression that Vassili was devoted to her. His amazement was, therefore, all the greater when, happening to call unexpectedly, he saw Marie with tear-stained eyes sitting in desolate loneliness. As a result of that interview Peter Tarnowska knew that he had found his ideal, but, of course, he was too late. She was another man's, and that man was his brother.

Vassili Tarnowska, who prided himself on his taste, was in the habit of haunting night restaurants with beauties of questionable antecedents, and he was presiding at a banquet in a restaurant in Kieff when he was startled to see his wife enter with a man. She was beautifully dressed, and she looked so happy that he thought her the loveliest woman there. The realization made him jealous, and Tarnowska, who did not want his wife until others showed their appreciation of her beauty and wit, now came back to her, and at once was the most jealous of husbands.

Had Marie been wise she would have seized the opportunity to atone for the past and make her future happiness certain. She had two pretty children, and Tarnowska was evidently determined to do his duty by them all, but the countess had already gone too far to wish to withdraw. She had lovers ; here a doctor, there an officer of the Imperial Guard ; and there was always a flattering number of candidates for the honour of escorting her to the theatre or restaurant. She was convinced that respectability was synonymous with dullness, and, accordingly, when the count expressed his penitence and desired a reconciliation he was too late. Marie had no room for him now in her over-crowded heart.

They lived together, of course, and entertained on the lavish scale which brought so many Russian families to poverty in the pre-revolution period. Marie was the

most popular of hostesses, for she possessed that happy faculty of making each of her guests feel that the entertainment was got up solely in his or her honour.

Months of riotous pleasure passed. Vassili Tarnowska's jealousy became a mania. He suspected every man he saw in his home, and his wife's flippant and contemptuous answers to his questions exasperated him. The beauty found it impossible to forgive or forget the fact that the husband she had once considered the most chivalrous man in all the world had been the only male to neglect her for other women.

They were at breakfast one morning when Tarnowska was handed a telegram. Suddenly he leaned across the table and screamed a question to her.

" What have you been doing to my brother Peter ? " he cried.

Marie could not speak.

" Read that," said the count, as he thrust the telegram into her shaking hand.

" Peter hanged himself last night." She read the message aloud in a voice that grated on him. " He was a foolish boy," she remarked indifferently. " I had forgotten his existence."

The tragic fate of Peter Tarnowska was still being talked about when Alexis Bozevsky became the lover of the countess. He was the type of man who looks and acts like the hero of a melodrama. He was tall, with a superb figure, a moustache that seems to have been irresistible, a *bonhomie* men and women were hypnotized by, and he was, undoubtedly, a past master in the art of pleasing romantically-minded ladies.

He penned a couple of letters to Marie, which won her for him, body and soul. She ran the most terrible risks on his behalf once she was in love with him, and the woman who was a queen amongst men now gladly became the slave of this handsome officer of the Imperial Guard.

The story of their love is brief and tragic and very melodramatic. It is difficult to believe that it all happened so recently as 1907. The jealous husband, the handsome lover, the cigarette-smoking Russian countess with the beautiful face and dark eyes—all belong to the stage; yet the Tarnowskas and Alexis Bozevsky were real personages, and two of them are living to-day.

For some time Marie's latest conquest was unnoticed by her husband, who hoped that his brother's suicide would reform her. When he stumbled upon the truth he simultaneously resolved to kill Bozevsky in a duel. The first encounter between the jealous husband and the handsome lover took place in the house of the former. Tarnowska was armed, but he would not shoot a defenceless foe, and he flung on the table a revolver for his enemy.

"We will settle it here," he said, with the laugh of a madman.

Bozevsky was terrified by that laugh, and fled from the apartment to tell Marie what had happened. They agreed on a course of action, knowing that there was no room in the world for both the count and the officer, and they felt that they were helpless to avert the approaching tragedy.

A few days later Count Tarnowska, very pale and very self-possessed, entered the police station at Kieff.

"I have shot Alexis Bozevsky," he said calmly. "I found him dining with my wife at the Grand Hotel. I am your prisoner."

The astounded and agitated inspector did not detain him. Tarnowska was of too high a rank, and, besides, he suspected that the count was not quite right in his head. But Tarnowska had spoken the truth. Bozevsky was not dead, but he was dying, and Marie had left her home and had deserted her children in order to nurse him.

Bozevsky lingered for a few days, and Marie scarcely

ever left his side. She knew that never again would she go back to her husband. The attack on Bozevsky outside the Grand Hotel precluded that. She spent hours praying for the recovery of the young officer whom she passionately loved, and often he would lie with a wan smile on his strained face whilst she pictured their happy future together. At these interviews Dr. Stahl, who was attending the wounded man, was always present. He was pale and weak-looking, obviously the victim of drugs, and Marie ignored him because she knew that he was in love with her too!

For Stahl had introduced Marie to the mysteries of drug-taking, to which she was now addicted. This accounts for a lot. At her trial she was described as a "human vampire," yet at times she had been the most devoted of mothers and the most generous of friends. But she lacked a brake to steady her when she began to descend, and she went from one wickedness to another until the final catastrophe.

When the young officer died Marie Tarnowska's heart died too. She could never love again, and she never did, but she could pretend to. In her desolation she rushed off into the country; she travelled and tried to forget. Her husband and her children were lost to her; she had been told that she would never be allowed to see them again. The sentence hardly affected her, for she could not think of anything or anybody now that the world was very lonely and her life empty.

Hitherto Marie Tarnowska had never known what it was to lack money. She had spent freely without any thought of the morrow. She had no idea of the value of money. In the past it had always been there for her to take. But now that her husband no longer acknowledged her existence her sources of supply were cut off, and it was the soulless proprietor of a second-rate hotel who drew her attention to the fact that even

beautiful countesses must pay their way or suffer the humiliations attendant on poverty.

It was a bitter awakening. Marie Tarnowska became terrified. She could not earn her living; she must beg or borrow, or kill herself; and she had no desire to die.

She was walking to a telegraph office to send a message to her father explaining her position and imploring him to respond, when she heard her name pronounced by some one behind her. Turning, she recognized Donat Prilukoff, one of the wealthiest lawyers in Moscow. He had been a visitor at her house in the days of her glory, and Marie had been aware that he was in love with her.

Prilukoff was rich! Marie recollected that too! She had disliked him in the past, but she was poor now and beggars cannot be choosers.

"My dear friend," she murmured, and tears came into her fascinating eyes.

Prilukoff guessed how her affairs stood, and came to the rescue, but she could not forget her antipathy to the lawyer. A new passion had arisen in her, however, a passion for money, and henceforth she meant never to feel the want of it again, even if she had to pretend to love Prilukoff.

They became inseparable, the Moscow lawyer and the beautiful adventuress who had broken so many hearts and her own life.

"What has become of Dr. Stahl?" Marie asked shortly after their reunion.

Prilukoff laughed carelessly.

"He shot himself through the heart the other day," he said, in a callous tone. "They sent for me, and he died with your name on his lips, Marie."

She was "Marie" now to the man she had christened "The Scorpion" when she was rich and at the height of her popularity.

Prilukoff, middle-aged and unromantic-looking, was

fiercely in love with the countess. At all their previous meetings he had been thrust into the background by the clever, handsome young men who had worshipped at Marie Tarnowska's shrine, but now he had her to himself. Every day she accepted money from him. Her creditors having discovered her address, presented their bills with unveiled threats.

Prilukoff saved the situation each time. He paid out thousands of pounds, and Marie Tarnowska hated him the more she was indebted to him. Had he ill-treated her she might have showered kisses on his feet, but he was recklessly generous, and she despised and hated him. She was that sort of woman.

It was necessary, of course, that they should move about, for it would have damaged Prilukoff's reputation as a sound family lawyer whom elderly ladies could trust with their investments if it was known that he was supplying a notorious woman with funds.

Marie gladly went to Italy, leaving the lawyer to attend to his business, but he was with her again within seventy-two hours.

"I cannot bear to let you out of my sight," he said. "The business must take care of itself."

"But what about money?" asked Marie nervously. It was all she thought of now. "I owe a thousand pounds to my dressmaker, and ——"

Prilukoff produced a roll of notes.

"Don't be afraid," he said, "there is always plenty to be had."

She was completely in Prilukoff's power when she renewed her acquaintanceship with an old friend, Count Paul Kamarowsky, a colonel in the Russian Army, and a wealthy man. The count had just lost his wife, and he was endeavouring to escape from loneliness by wandering about Europe with his little daughter. Marie, therefore, came into his life again at a very critical time, and she had no difficulty in making him fall in love with

her. He was ready to be tricked, and with Prilukoff's help she proceeded to swindle him.

Marie had had no intention of obtaining money from Kamarowsky until the Moscow lawyer had startled and terrified her by confessing that he was practically penniless. He had not only spent his means on her, but he had stolen over forty thousand pounds from his clients in order to satisfy her extravagant whims. When Marie, regarding him with horror, suggested that he should return to Moscow, he gripped her by the wrist.

"I've ruined myself for you," he cried hoarsely. "Once I was the most respected lawyer in Moscow, now I am a common thief, and if I return I shall be arrested. Marie, you must be mine. I love you. I have sacrificed everything for you. You must never desert me. If you do ——"

She saw the threat in his eyes, but did not hear his words.

Events now followed one another in rapid succession. Prilukoff had to be careful to keep out of the way of the police, whilst Countess Tarnowska, who would have given anything to be rid of him, had to see him every day and discuss ways and means of obtaining supplies of hard cash.

Prilukoff, who discerned that Kamarowsky was in love with Marie, conceived a scheme by which they eventually extracted a large sum from him. Scarcely had the swindle been accomplished than Marie heard that her husband had divorced her. She was free to marry again, and she had already pledged her word to the swindling lawyer to take his name, but Count Paul Kamarowsky, rich, of noble family, and likely to make a devoted husband, was going to propose to her!

The count did so that very night, and Marie accepted him, extracting a promise that he would keep their engagement a secret. She was terrified lest Prilukoff should tell Paul that she was his, and so she played with

the two men, keeping them apart and persuading each that he was the chosen bridegroom, though well aware that she was in the power of Prilukoff and that she dare not disobey him.

Marie was not in love. As I have said, her capacity for love had ceased to exist with the death of Alexis Bosevsky, but she wanted Kamarowsky's fortune, and she would obtain it only by conspiring with Donat Prilukoff, the dishonest lawyer, her master.

As though the situation was not sufficiently compliothed, a third lover now came on the scene. This was Nicholas Naumoff, a youngster of twenty, the only son of the governor of Orel. Nicholas and Kamarowsky were devoted friends, and when the count introduced him to Marie he succumbed on the spot to the charmer.

With three lovers, one of whom held her in the hollow of his hand, Marie Tarnowska had a breathlessly exciting time. In the old days she would have enjoyed the situation, but now she hungered and thirsted for gold, and it was of money only that she thought whenever she asked herself what she should do.

The lawyer from Moscow haunted her. How she wished that he would die and leave her to marry the rich Count Kamarowsky, the man who could take her back into society and open the doors now closed to her! Marriage with Prilukoff would mean the perpetuation of her disgrace, and she would inevitably sink lower; yet she dare not move without his permission, and whenever he came to her she had to do his bidding.

It was a cruel trick of Fate's to put her in such a position. Countess Tarnowska, who had once driven men crazy by her capriciousness, the beauty who could pick and choose her lovers—and did so—was now at the beck and call of an ugly lawyer with an ugly record! She shed bitter tears, and was only comforted when Prilukoff whispered that there was a way of getting

Kamarowsky's fortune and never knowing again the terrors of poverty.

Meanwhile, Paul Kamarowsky suggested that they should prepare for their wedding. Marie, who only dreamt of the time when she would be his, had to plead for a postponement, knowing that if she fixed the date Prilukoff would do something desperate. But despite her dislike for the lawyer she complained to him that Kamarowsky had not yet referred to financial matters.

Prilukoff, confident that Marie could not escape his clutches, propounded a plan whereby Kamarowsky was to be induced to make his will in her favour and also insure his life for £25,000 on her behalf. The trick was simplicity itself.

Prilukoff allowed Marie to dine with Kamarowsky in an hotel at Venice, where they were all staying, and in the middle of the dinner a waiter handed the woman a letter. Marie started and went crimson when she read it, and her companion, insisting on seeing what had disturbed his fiancée, read the note, which purported to have been written by a well-known Russian prince offering to settle his fortune on her and insure his life for £25,000 if only she would return to Russia and marry him. Prilukoff had, of course, written the letter, and Marie Tarnowska acted her part so realistically that the next day Kamarowsky's will and insurance on his life were facts, and she was heiress to both!

But once Kamarowsky had appointed the Russian beauty the sole inheritor of his property in the event of his death the conspirators wasted no time arranging for his murder. They both wanted his money badly. Marie, realizing that she could never marry him without Prilukoff's permission—a permission which would never be granted—entered into the conspiracy with a callousness and an abandon that were inhuman. She was only twenty-seven, but she could plot in cold

blood to take the life of one who had been and was extremely generous to her.

Of course Marie herself would not do the deed, and Prilukoff, whose nerve had long since gone, was quite incapable of actually killing anyone. He could arrange the details and hand the knife or revolver to the selected assassin, but beyond that he could not go.

However, they were thorough and remorseless plotters. Kamarowsky was in their way. His death would make Marie a rich woman and Prilukoff a rich man, because then he could make her marry him. The count, therefore, must be removed. But who was to kill him? That was a question that was answered within a few hours by the arrival of Nicholas Naumoff.

The young man found Marie in her hotel at Venice, and there and then it flashed across her mind that he was the very person to kill Kamarowsky and at one stroke turn her poverty into riches, for Prilukoff having no more clients to rob, Kamarowsky must be murdered.

She was too clever, of course, to take him into her confidence, although Naumoff was so infatuated that he would have obeyed any command she was pleased to give him. But Marie Tarnowska had a wholesome fear of the law, and, whilst she was willing to consign her young friend to a living grave, she had not the slightest desire to experience the discomforts of a prison herself.

It turned out that Naumoff had called to ask her to marry him. His proposal inwardly amused Marie, for he was so young and she was so old—in experience. But she listened gravely to him, and when he had finished she kissed him on the forehead and whispered in a voice broken with sobs that she had prayed for this day and now that it had come she could not, dare not, aspire to happiness because a certain man stood between them and would prevent their marriage.

The ardent youth naturally demanded to know who

it was who was driving her to madness. She answered under pressure that he was Count Paul Kamarowsky, Naumoff's dearest friend.

He was so surprised that he tried to persuade Marie that she was mistaken. Somehow Naumoff had not regarded Kamarowsky as an aspirant to her hand. He was so old compared with him, and love was, in his opinion, the prerogative of youth.

"Watch him," said Marie, who had been secretly engaged to the count for some months, "and you will be convinced that he persecutes me. I have to be polite to him, but, Nicholas, dear, I should be happy if I never saw him again."

Naumoff watched as bidden, and of course he saw Kamarowsky wait attentively on the woman to whom he was engaged. Quite innocent of the fact that he was giving cause for offence to his young friend, Kamarowsky seldom went out unaccompanied by Marie; and, when he was not looking and Nicholas was near her, she would make a little grimace of disgust to indicate that the count's presence was distasteful to her.

Naumoff, who had again proposed to Marie and been accepted, was nearly driven out of his mind by jealousy. He had pledged his word of honour not to reveal his engagement to Kamarowsky, who was also similarly placed by a promise to the beauty. Only Prilukoff, who remained in the background, knew the true state of affairs, and he was too worried by fear of the police to be able to enjoy the comedy.

But that comedy quickly developed into one of the most amazing tragedies of modern times, for Naumoff, hot-headed and irresponsible when under the influence of the Russian Delilah, decided to kill the man Marie described as her persecutor, the lover by whose death she stood to gain a fortune.

It was in the month of September, 1907, that the decision was come to. As soon as she heard it Marie

found it convenient to take a trip to Vienna and wait there for the tragedy which would give her Kamarowsky's large fortune and enable her to collect £25,000 from the insurance companies. Prilukoff also vanished, having arranged to return to Marie when she had entered into her inheritance.

So that she might not be suspected of participation in the crime the woman wrote a letter to the Chief of Police at Venice, warning him that there was a feud between Nicholas Naumoff and Paul Kamarowsky and that in all probability they would have recourse to fire-arms. Acting on this letter the police watched Kamarowsky's apartments, and by a strange coincidence arrested a man who came from them at the moment Naumoff fired the shots which aroused the house. The prisoner, however, was released when it was seen he was not the person they wanted.

When Naumoff, mad with jealousy, called on Paul one morning, the count warmly welcomed him, though owing to the early hour he had to receive him in bed. But the moment he saw Naumoff's expression he guessed something was wrong. Before he could speak, however, the young man drew his revolver and fired two shots at close range into Kamarowsky's body. The injured man managed to rise to his feet and ask why his dearest friend had turned against him. Naumoff babbled out something about Marie Tarnowska, and the count understood.

"You have been fooled," he muttered, for he was rapidly losing blood. "Ah, there is some one on the stairs. Quick, I will help you to escape by the window. Some day you will understand. Nicholas, I—I loved you as a son. I never thought it would come to this. Quick—this way."

Kamarowsky actually assisted his murderer to escape, but Naumoff did not evade the police for long, and when he was locked in a cell he knew that not only had Countess

MARIE TARNOWSKA ENTERING THE COURTHOUSE AT VENICE.

Marie Tarnowska been arrested, but that Prilukoff, the swindler, was also in custody.

The count was taken at once to a hospital, and a famous surgeon stitched up his wounds.

"He will live," he said. "No vital part has been touched."

It seemed as though the Tarnowska tragedy was to end in a trial for attempted murder only, but Fate was relentless, for the chief surgeon who had pronounced Kamarowsky's life to be safe suddenly went mad in the hospital ward and ordered the stitches to be removed from the healing wound. A few hours afterwards Kamarowsky died in agony, and the last words of his delirium were a message of love for Marie, the woman who had planned his death and who had tricked his best friend into committing the crime.

The three accomplices spent over two years in prison before being arraigned, and the trial was a protracted affair in spite of the fullest confessions by the prisoners. Sensations were innumerable during the proceedings and there were many emotional scenes, and on May 20th, 1910, the Venice jury brought in a verdict of guilty, adding a rider to the effect that the countess and Naumoff were suffering from partial mental decay. Prilukoff was sentenced to ten years' solitary confinement; Marie Tarnowska to eight years' and four months' imprisonment, and Naumoff to three years and one month, the time already spent in gaol to be included.

As for Marie Tarnowska, the beauty who had ruined many lives, she went to her punishment as if in a trance. All her scheming, all her heartlessness and greed only brought her in the end to a convict's garb and years of unceasing and humiliating labour. And from the cell she passed to obscurity.

CHAPTER II

AN INFAMOUS FEMALE POISONER

GESINA GOTTFRIED was, as a girl, plump and pretty, bright and pert, and the young men of the town in Germany in which she was born never let her know what loneliness meant. She had, of course, numerous suitors; and, while the social position of her parents was a poor one, she did not hesitate to declare that she would only marry a man likely to make money and give her the luxuries for which she craved. This was regarded as a good joke by her acquaintances, for in those days the status of women in Germany was even lower than it is to-day, and they were regarded, after they had lost their youth and their looks, as on a level with the beasts of the field—it was no uncommon sight to see women harnessed to the plough—and they were expected to toil all day long.

However, pretty Gesina was humoured, and, after taking stock of all her lovers, her choice alighted upon one named Miltenberg. He had a small business of his own, was reputed to possess a considerable sum in the savings bank, and bore the reputation of being ambitious, and, therefore, certain to make more money. Gesina's parents cordially approved of her decision, and at the age of seventeen the girl became a wife. Within three years she was the mother of two fine children, and the small world in which the Miltenbergs lived envied them.

But the truth was that the marriage had proved a miserable fiasco. The young bride had not taken long to discover that her husband was an improvident drunkard, who was heavily in debt and who lived on the verge of the gaol. Whenever she remonstrated he treated her cruelly, and it was only Gesina's pride that prevented her denouncing him. But she was compelled to conceal her grief because she would not give her jealous girl friends and former rivals an opportunity to jeer at her, for she had boasted often that she was going to be a lady and that when she was married she would have a servant of her own. They had derided her then, and she would not tell them now that she had made a mistake in marrying Miltenberg, the drunkard and wife-beater.

So the girl who had dreamed of being a lady and had actually become a drudge was terrified every time she heard her husband enter the house. Food was scarce, but the cries of her children did not arouse a mother's love. She turned upon them and exhausted her rage by ill-treating them ; yet Gesina was able to keep up appearances and her parents did not guess the real state of affairs.

About four years after her marriage Gesina paid a visit to her mother. She found her engaged in a war against the mice that were infesting the kitchen, her principal weapon being white powder which she had bought from the local chemist.

As Gesina sat and watched the bodies of the poisoned mice it seemed to her a pity that brutal husbands could not be as easily got rid of, and her thoughts dwelling for a long time on this injustice she finally abstracted some of the white powder when her mother was upstairs.

Gesina reached home that night with the precious powder, half an hour before her husband returned from one of the vilest cafés in the town. She was trembling with excitement and her pale cheeks were now flushed,

and she looked something like the girl Miltenberg had married four years earlier. But he was too far gone to notice anything, and beyond the customary threats his only remark was to growl his appreciation of the glass of beer with which Gesina unexpectedly presented him. The beer was not yet poisoned, for Gesina had decided to give him one more chance. It was, of course, a hopeless one, as it was not possible that he would reform unexpectedly and never strike her again.

The drunken boor was sitting at the table clutching the glass when a knock came to the door, and a moment later Gesina had admitted a mutual friend, Gottfried, a young man who had shown for some time that he admired her. Locked within the ill-used wife's breast was the secret of her strange love for this weak youth, and now the sight of him inflamed her, as she knew that she had the means to free herself from the brute whose name she bore. Gottfried's coming there that night meant sentence of death on Miltenberg, and without any compunction the woman dropped some of the arsenic into his glass.

The doctor who attended Miltenberg during his brief fatal illness was aware of the fellow's dissipated life, and he readily certified that death was due to natural causes.

Gesina was now in a position to marry Gottfried, and there was yet a chance that she might be rich and happy.

Without troubling about mourning she renewed her acquaintance with Gottfried, who had by now, however, grown tired of her. Perhaps he had read her character that night he had called and sat beside Miltenberg whilst the latter drank the poisoned beer. Perhaps he had a suspicion of the truth, and was afraid lest he should meet with the same fate. But the poisoner ignored his coldness towards her. She had determined to marry him, and marry her he must.

She forced a proposal from him, and then an unexpected obstacle arose in the opposition of her parents. Gesina was astounded; Gottfried secretly delighted. He was always docile and submissive when in her company, but once he was out of her sight he hated her. She was too self-willed and masterful for him, and he was a genuinely happy man when he was informed that her parents considered him too obscure and contemptible to be worthy the honour of their daughter's hand.

In vain Gesina argued, implored and threatened. The old people would not give way. They told her that it was her duty to look after her children and not bother about a second husband, and as they had the law on their side Gesina would only fling herself out of the house and return to her own squalid one to ponder over her grievances.

A woman of her sort could come to only one decision, and that was to send her father and mother to their graves with the aid of the white powder which had proved so effective in the case of her brutal husband. She accordingly pretended to forget Gottfried, and sought a reconciliation with her parents, who, to celebrate the reunion, gave a pork supper in her honour. Gesina, who was particularly fond of this favourite dish, did full justice to it, although before sitting down to the table she had put arsenic in the beer her parents were to drink! When they were taken to their room in agony she calmly continued to eat, and she was so callous that when they died she shed no tears.

With three victims to her account Gesina went to see Gottfried. He affected to be overjoyed at meeting her again, and, fortified by the knowledge that the opposition of her parents rendered a ceremony of marriage between them impossible, spontaneously invited her to have dinner with him. But Gesina took away his appetite at the very beginning of the meal by informing him that her parents had suddenly died, and that there was now

no reason why he should not fulfil his promise and make her his wife.

Gottfried went pale with terror, and so great was his agitation that she noticed it at once, and taxed him with trying to deceive her. The unhappy coward protested that she was doing him an injustice.

"I am grieved to hear of their death," he stammered, perspiration breaking out on his forehead. "I had a great respect for them, and your tragic news has upset me."

Gesina laughed contemptuously.

"Considering that they always treated you like dirt, you needn't wear mourning for them," she retorted. "Don't be a fool, Hermann. All I want to know is when we can be married? I'm tired of living alone."

The last sentence put an idea into his head. It reminded him that she had two children. In faltering tones he suggested that it would be inadvisable to marry. He swore that he had nothing saved, and that it would be too heavy a burden for him to provide for a wife who would bring with her another man's two children.

If Gesina had not been satisfied that she had the means of removing everybody who stood in her way she would have been extremely angry with Gottfried, but now she only became pensive, and a little later proceeded to discuss his objection in detail.

"You don't object to me, I suppose?" she asked, holding her clasped hands under her chin.

He protested with many oaths that he loved her to distraction, but that the children were so many barriers to their marriage because he was really poor.

"Very well," she observed, before changing the subject, "I will wait until the children are not a burden to anybody."

A fortnight later she met him again.

"My children are dead," she said simply. "They

had convulsions a week ago, and quickly passed away. I am now quite alone in the world."

The man regarded her with horror. It is most likely that he was the only person who suspected that these unexplained deaths were no mysteries to her. But he could not have thought for a moment that she was a fivefold murderess!

Gottfried was an ignorant and superstitious man, and he knew nothing about poisons. All the deaths caused by Gesina's "white powder" had been duly certified by respectable local practitioners, and he had not the courage to create a scandal by voicing his suspicions regarding the two children.

There was something fascinating about Gesina, and Gottfried's will power always vanished when he was with her. But nevertheless, he made a brave struggle to resist her, and, although he agreed to an engagement, he never had the slightest intention of becoming her husband.

Gesina pretended to be satisfied with his promise, and even when, as the occasion arose, he put forward the flimsiest of excuses to postpone the ceremony, she was ever contented and apparently happy. A few months went by, and there were no more sudden deaths among her relatives. Gottfried's fears left him and he began to think of her as he had in the days when she was a young bride.

Yet he stopped short at marriage, and beyond an engagement would not go. As the young woman very seldom referred to the former he was very pleased to take her to the cafés and to the theatres, and generally have a good time in her society. But he totally misunderstood the character of the creature who called herself his sweetheart. Gesina was content because she had already devised a method by which she knew that she would accomplish her object. She had not poisoned five human beings without learning a lot, and she was

now an expert. She knew exactly how to kill and how to cause an illness without fatal results, and she decided to dose Gottfried until she had so weakened him in body and mind that he would be mentally as well as physically at her mercy.

The infatuated fool never suspected anything, and when his mysterious illness began he did not draw any inferences from the fact that Gesina often sat by his side while he was drinking. Of course the vile creature had used every opportunity to administer arsenic in small quantities, and she had many, because she insisted upon nursing him.

It was a most scientific and crafty murder, because as Gottried grew weaker he got more affectionate, and she gave him the poison so cleverly, and worked upon his feelings so astutely, that he came to regard her as his devoted nurse! He would allow no one else to come near him or give him his medicine, and every day his passion for her increased, and he shed tears when she was not with him. Gesina, after coaxing him to take poisoned soup, would sit by his bed and cheer him by painting their future together in rosy colours. She would not hear of a fatal issue to his illness, and what with her gaiety and her optimism the patient thought her an angel.

But despite her "nursing" he grew worse every day, until it was obvious that he was going to die. By this time he was too weak to be able to think of anything except his love for Gesina, and at last he asked her as a favour to marry him on his death-bed.

Within an hour of his proposal, Gesina, dressed in black, called upon a clergyman, and told a heart-rending story of a dying lover who had implored her to ease his last hours by consenting to be his wife. The minister of religion was touched, and instantly agreed to marry them. He repaired at once to the death-chamber, and there the dying man and the murderess joined hands and were made man and wife. Within twenty-four

hours, however, Gesina was a widow again, for Gottfried passed away as the result of an extra strong dose which she administered twenty minutes after she had become Frau Gottfried.

She did not lose anything by the marriage even if she did not gain much. Gottfried left a few hundred pounds, and to this sum she succeeded. Her principal motive for marrying him was vanity. So many persons had talked sneeringly of her long engagement to Gottfried that Gesina knew it would surprise and mortify the gossipers if she did really become his wife, and to gratify this whim she slowly poisoned him!

But her successes were so numerous, that she took to poisoning people as a hobby. The "white powder" was her infallible remedy for removing objectionable men and women. She did not fear the doctors, and she laughed at their ignorance. Most of them were quacks, and none of them were a match for the quick-witted woman, who seemed to flourish on murder. She might dwell in an atmosphere of death, yet there were always men to court her, and the good-looking widow had several proposals.

The third opportunity to marry, which she decided to accept, came from a prosperous merchant, who was fascinated by the young face and the glib tongue of the poisoner. He met Gesina for the first time at Gottfried's funeral, and he had accompanied her home with a few other friends to comfort her, and after that he frequently called, until it was obvious that Gesina liked him. That unlucky merchant was, however, indirectly responsible for one of Gesina's most brutal crimes ere he, too, fell a victim to her devilish arts.

One night the merchant was chatting with the widow, when a tall, stout soldier staggered into the room the worse for drink. Gesina and the merchant started to their feet, and the latter would have turned upon the drunkard had not the woman recognized her brother,

whom she had not seen for years. During those years Wilhelm had not improved ; he was, in fact, after the stamp of her first husband, Miltenberg, a drunkard and a bully, and he now insisted upon being made welcome, behaved rudely, insulted Gesina's lover, and was only pacified by offerings of unlimited beer. When he had drunk sufficient he announced his intention of remaining in the house, and there was every reason to suspect that he intended to cadge and bully her out of her small means before taking his departure.

But the " white powder " solved the problem. Gesina woke him up in the middle of the night with a glass of beer in her hand, which he delightedly drank, and thanked her with brotherly affection. At nine o'clock he was a corpse, and when Gesina knocked on his door and called out the time she received no answer. She had not expected one.

The merchant, who had been thoroughly disgusted with the soldier's behaviour, could scarcely express conventional regret when he heard the news, and he gained Gesina's gratitude by paying the funeral expenses. Out of gratitude Gesina fixed the date for their marriage, but a week before the ceremony was to be performed her lover fell ill.

His days on earth were now numbered. Gesina, averse to becoming his wife, had poisoned him, but in the same way as she had done Gottfried. She dosed him into a state of utter helplessness, and when he was prostrate she induced him to make a will in her favour. This was the day before he died. The doctor was never even suspicious, and her lover was buried. Then she retained a clever lawyer to collect his effects, turn them into hard cash, and remit the money to her. A few relatives protested, but Gesina and the lawyer settled them, and the murderess entered with intense satisfaction into possession of three thousand pounds, a large sum to her.

A year subsequent to this crime she was again engaged,

and once more she slowly poisoned her fiancé and he made her his heir. When his will had been drawn up she administered the final dose, and, having allowed a few days to elapse, proceeded to inquire into the extent of her inheritance.

Greatly to her anger and astonishment, she discovered that she had been hoaxed. Her victim had left nothing except debts, and she had wasted valuable arsenic upon him. To add insult to injury, rumours spread that Gesina had inherited a large fortune, and several persons who had lent her money began to press for repayment.

Besides being a murderess, Gesina was very mean. She could borrow from the poorest of her acquaintances, but she would not repay them even when she had a considerable amount to her credit. She loved money, and nothing pleased her better than to add to her store of gold coins. She was in the habit of carrying five hundred pounds about with her in notes and gold, and she gradually acquired a collection of jewellery.

It is difficult to write of her as a human being. One can hardly imagine that she ever existed, and yet all the details of her career I have given are on the official records of the German Criminal Courts.

Gesina with the blue eyes and the merry laugh went through life scattering death on each side of her. She could crack a joke with a man who was dying at her hands. She could dress in black and shed tears over a coffin, and at the same time debate with herself as to her next victim. She poisoned innocent and inoffensive persons just to keep her hand in. When she had over a thousand pounds she murdered a woman because she had asked for the return of a loan of five pounds.

The last-named affair occurred after the murder of the lover who had tricked her in death. Gesina's friend lived in Hamburg, and, having fallen upon evil times, and hearing that her old acquaintance was now a rich widow, she wrote asking to be repaid the money she had lent

her. Gesina sent an affectionate letter in return, inviting Katrine to visit her, when she would not only pay her the debt, but add a present for her past kindness. It is only necessary for me to add that Katrine never returned to Hamburg for my readers to realize what happened to her when she became Gesina's guest.

But on account of her numerous crimes Gesina was compelled to change her residence frequently, and when she bought a house in Bremen it was the sixth German town in which she had settled.

The house she took was capable of accommodating several families, and she considered it a safe investment for her "earnings." But somehow things went wrong. She was an expert poisoner, but she was not good at business, and eventually she had to raise a mortgage on her property at a ruinous rate of interest.

Gesina's ambition had always been to appear better off than her neighbours, and now, in order to gratify her vanity, she forgot her old passion for hoarding money. She lived luxuriously and dressed well, and, realizing that her mind was beginning to be reflected in her face, she took to paint and powder to conceal her true character. Youth had fled from her, although she was young in years. She was thin, scraggy, and unpleasing to the eye, but Gesina acquired the art of making up, and she was able to pose as a young-looking widow who had known sorrow without having been hardened by it.

For two years she played her part so well that she escaped detection. The "pretty widow" became a well-known character in Bremen, and it was often rumoured that she was about to be married again. But somehow an accident always happened at the critical moment. Either it was the wrong man, and then Gesina simply poisoned him, or else the right man became uneasy and backed out of the engagement, and the murderess felt that she dare not protest too much lest she should expose herself and her past to inquiry. Anyhow, she was still a

widow when the mortgagees foreclosed and took possession of her apartment house.

Gesina was now really poor. All her savings had gone, and with them her credit. She was actually in danger of starvation, and her condition was so forlorn that when the new owner of the house—he had purchased it from the mortgagees—came to turn her out and install his own family, he was so touched by her distress—and she looked so pathetically pretty as she sobbed in the darkened room—that he gave her the position of his housekeeper.

Herr Rumf was one of the most respected tradesmen in Bremen. A master wheelwright, he employed several hands, and was considered a generous employer. His wife and children adored him, and he was just the sort of man to be affected by a forlorn widow's grief, for he was large-hearted and easily roused to deeds of generosity.

Gesina was not long in Rumf's employment before she planned out a regular campaign of murder. She resolved to murder her employer's wife, and thus regain her ownership of the house, in addition to becoming the mistress of his fortune, for once she was his wife she meant to dispose of him as she had Gottfried and the infatuated merchant. As for Rumf, he unconsciously became a willing party to the plot. His own wife, aged by the cares of a large family, was not exactly an exhilarating companion, and he was charmed of an evening on his return from his shop by Gesina's ready wit and her stories of fashionable persons she pretended to have known when she was better off.

When Frau Rumf gave birth to a child it was Gesina who attended her, and who at night waited on Rumf, and banished his melancolia. He, too, began to cherish dangerous thoughts, and when his wife's illness took a turn for the worse, following the unexpected death of her infant, he was not nearly as distressed as he would have been had he never made the acquaintance of the widow

who had "come down in the world," as she often assured him.

The unfortunate wife died, and Gesina was given the charge of the five little children. Herr Rumf could not neglect his business. It was of far more importance to him than his family; and, while he observed all the conventions in mourning for his wife, he was too good a German to allow her decease to interfere with money-making. Gesina, therefore, reigned over his household; and, recalling what Gottfried had said about children being an obstacle to matrimony, she poisoned all five in the most fiendishly cruel manner.

The amazing thing is that Rumf never suspected that the seven tragedies in his household were not mere accidents of fortune. He was suspected of aiding and abetting the murderess, but as he very nearly became one of her victims he was not prosecuted, especially as he actually brought her career to an end.

His last child had just been interred when Herr Rumf himself had a breakdown. For some days he had found it impossible to retain food, and he was wasting away, when he ordered one of the pigs he kept to be killed and a portion of the meat cooked for him. As Gesina was then visiting some friends the meal was prepared by a servant, and to Rumf's extreme delight he found that it agreed with him. It was the first food he had eaten for a fortnight that he was able to digest.

Pleased at the discovery, he had a goodly piece of the pig placed in the larder for future use, being determined to live on pork until he found something else to agree with him. Nearly every day he took a look at the meat, just to see that it was all right, and it was only by accident that Gesina did not get to know of this. Rumf had forgotten to tell her of his wonderful discovery, and when she came across the spare rib of pork in the larder she guessed who it was for, without realizing all that it meant to Rumf, and decided that it would provide a safe

medium for administering another dose of arsenic to him. She accordingly sprinkled it with the white powder, not knowing how affectionately her employer regarded that particular piece of meat, and ignorant of the fact that he scarcely thought of anything else from morning until night.

One day Rumf came home earlier than he was expected. Gesina was gossiping with a neighbour, and did not see him enter the house. The wheelwright went to the larder to have a peep at his beloved pork, and he noticed immediately that it had been shifted. He picked it up to replace it, and then he saw the white powder. At once he remembered having seen similar powder before. It was in a salad which Gesina had prepared for him just before the beginning of his illness.

Without scarcely pausing to think, he wrapped the meat up in a cloth, and carried it to the police, who had it examined.

When the doctor reported that the white powder was arsenic Gesina was arrested. She instantly confessed in the most brazen-faced manner, recounting her exploits from the day she had murdered her first husband down to the attempt on Rumf's life, and, knowing that she would be shown no mercy, she reviled her gaolers, and defied them to do their worst.

Her trial and condemnation in 1828 followed as a matter of course, but Gesina went to her death with a mincing gait, and a sneer for mankind in general. She expressed only one regret, and that was that the notoriety her evil deeds had earned for her had resulted in the public becoming aware that her teeth were false!

CHAPTER III

BELLE STAR, THE GIRL BUSHRANGER

WHEN the American Civil War came to an end it set free from discipline thousands of rough, lawless men, many of whom subsequently adopted crime as a profession. Amongst them was the father of Belle Star. He was a tall, powerfully-built man, with rugged features and gorilla-like arms, a crack shot and a fearless horseman, and during the four years Star had fought on behalf of the Southern against the Northern States he had revelled in the conflict. Peace had no charms for him, and when the rival parties settled their differences he decided to make war on both. In other words, he took to the bush with half a dozen tried and trusted comrades, and for several years the gang, which steadily grew in numbers, terrorised the country-side.

Belle, his only child, was born near a battlefield and within sound of the booming of the guns. The mother did not long survive her birth, but, although nearly always on the march, Belle was well looked after. She was a pretty, fairy-like child, with blue eyes and an engaging manner, and she was the pet of the camp. The Southern soldiers called her their mascot, and before she was five she could handle a pistol, and by the time she was ten she was expert in the use of the lasso, carbine, bowie knife, and revolver.

When Star turned bushranger Belle was only twelve, but she was already well qualified to be a prominent

member of his gang. Only her father excelled her as a shot, and in horsemanship she was without a rival. Wild and apparently untamable steeds that Star himself dare not mount became docile as soon as Belle took them in hand. Animals loved her ; men feared and respected her.

She grew into a beauty, slim and fragile-looking, yet in reality very strong, intelligent, audacious and clever. When she was only fifteen she was once left in charge of the headquarters of the outlaws for a whole day whilst they rode to a certain town and held up the bank. During their absence a tramp attempted to rob the camp, but although he took Belle by surprise she soon had him on the defensive, and instead of killing her she killed him with her small white hands, slowly forcing the thief backwards with her hands around his throat ; then down on his knees, and, finally, left him a corpse at her feet. On the return of the outlaws she told her father what had happened, and he there and then named Belle as his successor in the leadership of the gang, and every man present swore to obey her when her turn came to reign over them.

Reared amid bloodshed, taught every day to regard human life as anything but sacred, and educated to believe that it was no sin to rob, it is not astonishing that at the age of eighteen Belle, for all her beauty, was a thorough-paced criminal. She had already shot down at least half a dozen men ; like her father she feared nothing, and flying along on a swift horse she was capable of hitting any human target within sight.

More than once her marksmanship had saved the gang from being surrounded and overpowered, and during the last two years of her father's life it was really her brain that guided the band of outlaws.

But the inevitable day came when Star, the terror of Texas, was slain in a running fight, and Belle succeeded to the vacant leadership.

Only those who knew what she really was could have taken her seriously in her new capacity. She was eighteen, with refined, delicate features, lovely blue eyes, a pair of rosy lips, and a slim figure. By now the gang consisted of twenty men, all veterans in vice and crime, big, brawny, evil and coarse. Not one of them would have hesitated to cut the throat of his own mother, yet Belle during her reign held them in the hollow of her hand.

They never dared to disobey her. There was never any talk of mutiny, as there had been in her father's lifetime, and animated by this perfect loyalty the gang went on from success to success, and Belle Star, the greatest of all female bushrangers, kept in subjection scores of villages and towns.

One of the first acts of the bloodthirsty spitfire was to "avenge," as she called it, the death of her father. Star had sent to their last account at least forty men and women, but Belle would have it that his death had been undeserved, and that because he had never robbed the very poor the Sheriff had no right to shoot him for trying to evade arrest. So she marked down the Sheriff for execution, and with six of her followers set out for the lonely farm belonging to the county official.

Despite the fact that she knew that the Sheriff was keeping a sharp watch for her, Belle did not hesitate to wreak vengeance on him. It was in the early hours of a June morning that she and her six followers rode out of the camp, and for five hours they travelled, only stopping when within half a mile of the Sheriff's residence. Then they dismounted, carefully tethered their horses in a wood, and did the remainder of the journey on foot, Belle leading the way, revolver in hand.

It was a lovely day, and as the Sheriff inspected his farm workers, a score of sturdy men devoted to his interests, he could hardly have suspected danger. He was fully protected and well armed in case of attack,

and, feeling secure, he wandered aimlessly towards the most remote corners of his property. He was idly sauntering in the direction of a tool-shed, when two men sprang at him, and before he could utter a sound had him on his back, gagged and bound.

Half an hour later the Sheriff was led before Belle Star, who was standing under an old tree waiting for him. There was very little beauty in her face now. Her eyes shone like a tigress', and her small white hands were clenched.

Belle was smelling blood and gloating in the coming murder of the man who had executed justice upon her father.

The outlaw chieftainess called it a " trial," but the Sheriff was doomed from the first. As they were out of earshot she allowed the gag to be removed from his mouth, and then he was mockingly asked if he could suggest any reason why he should not be suspended from the tree under which they had assembled.

The Sheriff was a brave man, and he knew that his fate was sealed. He did not, therefore, make any plea for mercy, but in the curtest tones told Belle that he was merely one more victim of hers, but that in time his murder would be avenged. He was proceeding to taunt her with her disgraceful life, when she flushed angrily, and ordered him to be strung up.

Her commands were obeyed, and Bell's last act was to scribble on a piece of paper, " Executed by Belle Star," and pin it to his coat, before she rode away with her six ruffians

The murder of the Sheriff aroused the country, and it seemed that Belle's career must be a short one. Rewards were offered for her death or capture amounting to more than ten thousand dollars.

All classes organized to hunt down the notorious female criminal. Respectable citizens enrolled themselves as patrols to guard their homes, and for miles around there

was not a town or village without its special defence. But Belle had her own system of obtaining information, and she learnt early all about the preparations that were being made to capture her, laughing and derisively boasting that she would outwit all her foes.

It was her fearlessness and audacity allied to success that held the gang in subjection. Belle could do no wrong. When any of them attempted a job on their own account they invariably failed. Thus when Belle injured her arm, and had to travel two hundred miles disguised in order to see a doctor, four of her followers thought they would rob a jewellery establishment and keep the " swag " for themselves. They found courage in drink, and proceeded to attack the shop, but everything went wrong from the start. They were surprised by a patrol, and a fight ensued, in the course of which two of them were shot dead. The others escaped, and reached the camp in an exhausted condition, and when Belle returned she punished them by making them do all the dirty work of the camp for a month, and fined the discomfited scoundrels by refusing to allow them to participate in the results of the next expedition.

That a young girl could dominate a gang of bloodthirsty ruffians in this manner would be incredible if the story of Belle Star's life was not fully authenticated.

With her usual cunning Belle waited until the enthusiasm of the numerous Defence Committees was cooled by inaction before resuming hostilities. For several weeks nothing was seen of her gang, and rumours began to circulate that she had fled with her followers to a less highly organized district, having realized that the good people of Texas were too clever for her.

Disguised as a man, Belle would visit various towns, and in the market places and hotels listen to legends about herself. She would laugh the loudest when the leading citizens eloquently depicted her fate if they got her into their hands. She had a sense of humour, and

she could stroll into a local Court and watch petty thieves being sentenced, and applaud moral sentiments uttered by the presiding judge, who could not know that the notorious female bushranger was sitting a few feet away from him!

But her greatest exploit, apart from her many crimes, was the winning of two races on the same day in full view of thousands of spectators. It happened that a town which had often suffered from her depredations decided to hold a special race meeting, and amongst several prizes two large sums of money were offered to the winners of two particular races, one being for male and the other for female jockeys.

Belle, realising that she was an expert rider, determined to enter for both events, and as the one for men took place an hour before that for the ladies, she assumed male attire, and as a handsome young man rode on to the racecourse. After giving a false name she was permitted to take her place at the post, and as her horse was the fleetest, and she was the most skilful jockey, victory followed as a matter of course.

She received the stakes from the local mayor, made a speech of thanks, and then retired. When she reappeared she was dressed as a country girl, and this time she was leading another horse.

She looked so simple and sweet that the stewards were only too delighted to accept her entry for the race for female jockeys, and loud was the applause when the young beauty came in an easy first. Once more Belle attended before the élite of the town to receive a considerable sum of money, and she was cheered to the echo by the huge crowd, amongst whom there were hundreds of men who had sworn to capture Belle Star alive or dead.

The funds proved very useful to the gang, but, better than that, the men were so surprised and delighted by her double exploit that they became more slavish in

their devotion to her. Belle was supreme. She knew now that if she led them into the very jaws of hell they would not draw back or complain.

Owing to her father's depredations having created a reign of terror amongst the country banks, a rule had been made requiring all cashiers to keep a fully loaded revolver on their desks, whilst if any suspicious stranger entered the premises one of the other clerks was to cover him unostentatiously with a revolver, and shoot at the first sign of danger. This innovation having reduced considerably the number of bank "hold-ups," it created a belief that it had succeeded in frightening away Belle Star's gang, but Belle proved that that was a great mistake.

Adopting her usual disguise of a young farmer, Belle went alone to Galveston to pick up gossip, and she was fortunate enough to overhear at one of the principal hotels a conversation between two merchants which revealed the interesting fact that a week later the National Bank was due to receive a consignment in gold amounting to one hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars.

That was the sort of thing that fired Belle's imagination, and although she knew that the National Bank was well guarded, and that the manager and cashier transacted business fully armed, she resolved to capture that consignment of gold.

She returned to her headquarters to give final instructions to her followers, and then she went back to Galveston, but this time she had assumed the character of a little old woman with a thin voice and a hesitating manner. She "fluttered" in the approved fashion of nervous old ladies, and more than one polite citizen of Galveston hastened to help her across the road when they saw her shrinking from lumbering cart horses.

It was exactly ten minutes before closing time when Belle timidly entered the National Bank and presented a cheque, which she asked the cashier to change for her.

She looked so pathetic in her black clothes, and was so apologetic and yet friendly, that the cashier felt quite sorry when he had to tell her that he could not oblige her for the simple reason that the cheque was drawn on the bank's branch at Austin, the capital of Texas. Perhaps some of his politeness was inspired by a glance at the signature on the cheque, which was that of a well-known United States diplomat.

The poor old lady looked greatly distressed, and when at last she fully understood that she was not to have the money she showed signs of collapsing. The cashier and one of the clerks hastened to come to her assistance, and they assisted her into the manager's office, where she sank on to a chair, and huskily whispered that she would be all right in a few moments.

Manager, cashier and clerk were glancing at one another when they were startled to hear the command —"Hands up!" The next moment the "little old lady" was covering them with her revolver, whilst six of the outlaws under her command entered the building, closed the door of the bank, and made all the officials prisoners. Then they visited the vaults and the strong-room, and, having waited until darkness had fallen, took the gold out and packed it in the van brought for the purpose, eventually riding away leisurely.

It was not until the early hours of the following morning that the trussed-up and gagged bank staff were discovered and released. By then Belle Star was far away, and for the next two days the gang were busy changing their quarters in case they had been tracked to their camp. This single exploit made them all rich, but, of course, there was no limit to their greed, and no sooner was it accomplished than Belle began to plan others equally daring.

But she had a woman's vanity, and she brooded over insults and taunts which a man would have ignored,

and she sometimes risked her own safety and that of her followers to avenge a petty slight.

She once happened to be in a populous town near Austin, when she heard the local judge declare that he knew Belle Star by sight and that he would shortly arrest her, and have her publicly whipped before handing her over to the Lynchers. The girl brigand and the judge were actually seated next to one another at the table d'hôte dinner at the hotel when he said this.

Belle smiled at his delusion, but when he proceeded to speak of her in opprobrious terms and gave her credit for more crimes than murder and robbery her anger nearly led her into revealing her identity. But she maintained control of herself, and after a little reflection decided to wait until the following morning before punishing the boastful judge.

Next morning after breakfast—she had registered as a man, and, of course wore male clothes—she mounted her horse in front of the hotel, and then sent a servant to tell the judge that a stranger wished to speak to him. At this time of day everybody was at work, and the hotel staff were busy indoors and in the stables. When the judge appeared he and Belle were practically alone, as she knew, and without hesitating she blandly informed him that she was Belle Star, and then raised her whip and lashed him in the face.

The judge was so astounded that he was unable to escape her until she had lacerated him considerably, and, half blind and smarting from pain, his shrieks for help were unanswered until Belle had reached a place of safety.

It is a well-known fact that when a woman deliberately embraces crime as a profession she is generally more brutal and merciless than the average male criminal. It was so with Belle Star. The fair-haired girl with the sunny smile and the lovely lips could in cold blood

sentence to death a young man whose only offence was that he had tried to defend his property and his life.

Belle, too, was in the habit of accepting her own suspicions as full proof. Once a well-laid scheme came to naught because at the last moment the owner of the shop that had been marked down for attack awoke to a realization of his danger and secured reinforcements. The outlaws were driven off, and Belle, savagely discontented and disappointed, came to the conclusion that her plans had been betrayed by a young farm hand who had been in her pay as a spy.

She, therefore, sent two of her followers to arrest him, but the suspect gave them no trouble, for he came willingly. Then Belle coldly told him of his offence. He swore he was innocent, but she cut him short by drawing her revolver and putting a bullet in his brain, and the gang buried the suspected traitor with as much nonchalance as they would have interred a dog.

It is impossible, however, to relate all her exploits. She personally led onslaughts on banks, stores, private houses, and public buildings.

She had a solution for every problem and a way out of every difficulty. When one of her men was arrested and was in imminent danger of death, Belle, finding that the judge could not be kidnapped, proceeded to make a prisoner of his wife, and the judge subsequently found a note pinned to his pillow, informing him that unless the captured outlaw was allowed to go free the lady would be murdered. He was given only twenty-four hours to save her, but, as the town was in a ferment over the excesses of the gang, the judge, guessing that he dare not acquit the prisoner, had to connive at his escape in order to prevent the murder of his wife. He had a bad time of it when his fellow-citizens heard how they had been cheated of their prey, and he was compelled to resign, but as his wife was returned safe and unharmed he was not sorry that he had placated the outlaw.

Belle had plenty of friends who worked secretly for her. They did not take any part in the raids, but they were very useful in supplying information and warnings, and more than once the gang escaped, thanks to the timely advice of these spies. Thus when Belle was heading an expedition to rob a bank, she looked for and found a certain mark on the bark of a particular tree within a couple of miles of the town. That told her that the bank had obtained the protection of the authorities, and would be more than a match for the outlaws. She proceeded no farther, and she afterwards learned that the proprietor of the bank had planned to capture the gang. Their disappointment when she and her followers never turned up at all was a source of amusement to her, and compensated for the collapse of her plans.

For a long time, however, the Government would not take any action against the marauders, maintaining that the local authorities ought to be able to deal with them. But, when within the space of a month five banks and six shops were burgled and nine innocent lives were lost, the Government realized that this was no local problem but a national affair after all. Belle Star was terrorizing the country in no unmistakable manner. Her word was law, and the State was ignored.

Hundreds of small farmers paid her weekly tributes to save them from being robbed of their all, and things came to such a pass that some mean-spirited persons actually proposed that each town should pay ransom money to Belle if she would only promise to keep away!

When the troops took the field against her Belle's days were numbered, although she refused to admit this, and she issued proclamations inviting the soldiers to come on. Certainly the initial encounters ended favourably for Belle. She added to her recruits, provided them with plenty of ammunition, and, setting an example of fearlessness, led them against the soldiers, and drove them off.

She had by now her headquarters in the midst of a forest, and it was possible for travellers to pass within a few yards of the huts without knowing that they were there. Beyond the huts was a miniature fortress which commanded the approach to the forest, and, as it could be attacked from one side only, it was easy for half a dozen desperate men, all expert marksmen, to hold hundreds at bay.

Despite the fact that a regiment of soldiers was searching for her and her gang, Belle refused to lie low. Her raids continued, and when a spy of hers appealed for help she promptly responded, although it involved great risks. This spy, a woman employed as a cook in an hotel, had a husband who had been arrested for a trivial offence, but as he had a bad record it was certain that if the judge discovered it he would give the fellow a long sentence.

As the prisoner had come from New York, the police of the latter city were asked for particulars of his career, and they responded by sending a list of his previous convictions to the judge at Galveston.

But the damaging papers arrived on a Friday night, and before the judge could see them Belle personally entered the post office, held up the staff, examined the correspondence, and, having found the bulging packet from the New York Chief of Police, took it away and destroyed it. The result was that the spy's husband was treated as a first offender, and let off with a nominal fine.

The day after this exploit Belle was riding alone near her camp, when she was attacked by two soldiers, who suspected her identity. They followed, thinking that they could capture the famous brigand easily. But Belle's object was to separate them, and when the man on the swifter horse outdistanced his comrade Belle turned in her saddle and, despite the pace at which she was going, killed him with her first shot.

His corpse had scarcely struck the ground when a second bullet ended the career of the other soldier.

These exploits gained for her a great deal of sympathy. The Texans were essentially a sporting race, and they argued that if a regiment of soldiers could not overcome a slip of a girl and a score of brigands then they deserved to be beaten. This was extraordinary, in view of the fact that Belle had robbed and pillaged all alike. The very poor she had spared for the reason that they were not worth robbing, but it was accounted a virtue unto her, and numerous acts of benevolence by her enhanced her reputation.

The fact was that Belle was as cunning as she was unscrupulous. She distributed money and provisions amongst the poor and worthless not because she had any pity for them, but because it was the cheapest way of obtaining the support at critical moments of a large portion of the population. Every gaolbird looked up to Belle as a subject does to a Sovereign, and they respected her all the more when they knew that she admitted to membership of her gang only the best experts in the criminal line.

At least four pitched battles were fought between the outlaws and the Government soldiers before the final encounter. Belle seemed to bear a charmed life. She always headed her colleagues and took the greatest risks, and when she emerged without a scratch from the fiercest encounters her ignorant and superstitious followers began to believe that she was not mortal. They had often seen her ride at a troop of armed soldiers and coolly pick off the officers, while all the time a perfect hail of bullets had sung around her fair head without touching her.

Whenever the battle was going against the outlaws it was Belle who revived their drooping courage, and she twice turned defeat into victory by her marvellous shooting. The outwitted and beaten commanders were

compelled to send for reinforcements, and, so variable is human nature, when a hundred weary and dust-strained troopers entered Austin, the town they had come to save, they were jeered at by the ungrateful inhabitants, who had learnt that in a pitched battle with Belle Star's outlaws the soldiers had been worsted.

Belle's end was fittingly dramatic. She was celebrating a run of success against banks and shops with a feast when news came that two hundred and fifty soldiers under the command of a major were advancing to storm the fort. Instantly she sprang to her feet and ordered every man to his place.

She was sobered in a moment by the news, which was as unexpected as it was unpleasant; and there were several of her followers who had drunk too much to be of use. In vain did Belle shake and curse them and even implore them to wake up. They could only stagger forward a few paces and collapse. One man, in a fit of drunken hilarity and bravado, began to fire indiscriminately, thereby revealing the hiding-place of the outlaws, and Belle was so enraged that she brained him with her carbine. There was no time to remove the corpse, for the soldiers could be heard approaching now, and Belle, realizing that this time it was going to be a fight to a finish, put herself at the head of her garrison, and prepared to conquer or die.

The outlaws were well entrenched, and had a plentiful supply of ammunition, but they were up against equally desperate men now. At last, seeing that if they remained in the fort those who were not killed outright would be captured, Belle personally led a sortie against the enemy, hoping to escape in the confusion. The men followed her gladly, remembering their previous victories, but most of them were still fuddled by drink, and in the circumstances could not be expected to show to advantage.

Belle was the only one to fight at her best. She

displayed amazing courage, time after time heading attacks on the troopers, who were so flustered as to show signs of panic. But the commander rallied them, and as by now the troopers regarded Belle Star as a demon and not as a human being they pressed forward to destroy her without being affected by her sex or age. When things were going against her she collected a few of her followers, and made one last desperate attempt to break through the ring of soldiers, but her luck failed her, and she fell riddled with bullets. It was the death she had always desired.

CHAPTER IV

THE WOMAN WITH THE FATAL EYES

JEANNE DANILOFF was reared in an atmosphere of mystery, intrigue and squalor. Her father was one of the many victims of Russian tyranny, and he had been forced to wander about Europe, going from one cheap boarding-house to another, accompanied by a wife who resented his lack of worldly success, and by a daughter who, as she grew older, rebelled against the squalid isolation of the life they were leading.

But Jeanne was not the sort of girl to accept her fate quietly. She had inherited her father's fanaticism, though she never applied it to political purposes, and also her mother's temper, and, becoming tired of the frequent quarrels between her parents, she eloped to Paris with an old gentleman. Jeanne was not sixteen, well developed, hardly a beauty, but possessed of a pair of remarkable eyes. She was well described later as "The woman with the fatal eyes." Jeanne was not destined to live many years, and yet during her brief career she hypnotized to their ruin three men, all of whom were, presumably, persons of education and position.

The ambitious, fiery-natured Russian girl meant to have a good time. Jeanne Daniloff was a curious mixture of pride and self-abasement. She hated poverty and she loved love. In her opinion the world ought to have been populated only by handsome men able to

provide her with every luxury, with a sprinkling of women to flatter her by their jealousy. Warm-hearted and warm-blooded, reared in proverty and trouble, Jeanne Daniloff was born to play a tragic rôle on the stage of life.

Her first escapade did not last longer than six months and by the time her elderly friend had deserted her Jeanne was an orphan. At that moment her fate was trembling in the balance, and she might have been left in her loneliness to sink to the lowest depths had not her grandmother, who had always loved the reckless and irresponsible girl, offered her a home. Jeanne accepted, and went to live at Nice, encouraged, no doubt, by the knowledge that Nice had many carnivals, and was a resort of the rich.

Her grandmother, who kept a boarding-house, was soon cured of her delusion that Jeanne would help her in the conduct of her establishment. Household work was not to the liking of the young girl, who thought only of dresses and dances and men, and while the old lady was left to look after her boarders Jeanne spent the days reading novels and the nights dancing. She became a well-known figure at the numerous dancing halls in Nice, and most men forgot her rather plain features once they came under the spell of her "fatal eyes." Jeanne had only to look at a man to bring him to her feet. Once she realized her power she revelled in it, and, despite her aptitude for doing nothing, she managed to educate herself to hold her own in the best society, into which she sometimes strayed.

There is always at least one critical turning point in the careers of women of the Daniloff type, and Jeanne's came unexpectedly at a ball at Nice. She was chatting with a couple of friends between dances when the master of ceremonies begged to be allowed to present a newcomer to her. A few moments later Jeanne Daniloff was face to face with a tall, pale young man with a weak

mouth and a nervous manner. Jeanne looked at him with her fatal eyes, and he was her slave.

Weiss was a lieutenant in the French Army, of good family, and with a future. In that crowd of adventurers and witlings he was a somebody, and when the following day he called on Jeanne at her grandmother's boarding-house he thrilled her with a proposal of marriage. It was not unexpected. Jeanne must have known that she had fascinated him, but she was nevertheless pleased at the prospect of becoming Madame Weiss, and in her usual manner she flung herself impetuously into the arms of her lover.

Her happiness was short-lived, however. Weiss's mother, when she heard of her son's intention, made it her business to interview Jeanne. Madame Weiss was not to be fascinated by the " fatal eyes," and she summed up the character of the boarding-house siren in terms that left no doubt in her son's mind that she would never consent to the union. As according to the law of France the young officer could not marry without his mother's permission the brief engagement between him and Jeanne came to an end.

The Russian girl quickly recovered her spirits and once again abandoned herself to the gaieties of Nice. The prospect of losing her turned Weiss's love into a burning passion. He attended balls just to catch a glimpse of her ; and it maddened him to see her smiling into the faces of men he imagined to be his rivals. Daily he pestered his mother to give her consent, but she held out against him, and at last Weiss had to resort to desperate measures.

With his promotion to the rank of captain he received orders to go to Oran in Algiers. The night before he was due to leave Nice he sought out Jeanne and implored her to elope with him. Of course he was in complete ignorance of the fact that the girl had already had that " affair " with that elderly gentleman which had ter-

minated in Paris. Young Weiss used all the eloquence of which he was capable, unable to realize that he was addressing one to whom elopement appealed irresistibly because it was an adventure.

They left together for Oran, and shortly after their arrival set up housekeeping under the soft, alluring skies of Algiers. The humid climate suited Jeanne. The mysticism and romantic beauty of North Africa captivated her; she revelled in the colour, the movement and the variety of the native towns and villages. As the reputed wife of Captain Weiss she mixed in the best society, and Jeanne was soon a popular hostess, whilst her fascination for men was as remarkable as ever it had been.

Meanwhile, the much-in-love Weiss had not ceased to pester his mother, and she, feeling that it would be foolish to resist any longer, gave her consent, and Captain Weiss and Jeanne Daniloff were married.

The ceremony had a curious effect upon Jeanne. She became deeply religious. Every morning she read the Bible, and her prayers were never neglected. She took to visiting the poor and her charity was boundless. Her husband was delighted. He was her most devoted admirer, and as he possessed qualities which made him an ideal husband she ought to have been very happy.

For a time Jeanne mastered herself sufficiently to appreciate him and to show her devotion by living only for him. His abilities had by now been recognized by the French Government, which had permitted him to retire from the army and take a well-paid civil appointment in the Algerian service. There was, therefore, no lack of money, and when in course of time Jeanne was the mother of two fine children, a son and a daughter, she seemed to be the happiest wife and mother in Oran.

She had the means to give dinner-parties and garden-parties, and the very best people were amongst her intimate friends. It was, indeed, a decided change

from the boarding-house at Nice and the cheap dancing halls.

Soon after the birth of her second child—in the early part of 1889—Captain Weiss bought a charming house and grounds at Ain-Fezza, near Oran. It was an ideal residence, and everyone envied Madame Weiss her home, her children and her husband. She had the reputation of being a most devout Christian and a good wife and mother.

The Paris elopement seemed to belong to another world. The reckless pleasure-seeking Jeanne Daniloff might never have existed, yet the time was fast approaching when her real self was to come to the surface again. Nothing could have prevented her being herself. She could not help her own nature. The daughter of the Russian revolutionaries, a veritable child of storm, could not maintain the character she had earned in Oran; and when all appeared well with her she plunged into a murderous intrigue which cost her everything—home, children, husband and life!

In the year 1889 an engineer of the name of Felix Roques came to Ain-Fezza to work on the Algerian Railways. He had not been long in the place when he was compelled to listen to glowing accounts of Madame Weiss, in which her piety and love for her family were dilated upon. Roques's curiosity was aroused. It seemed impossible that the world should contain so perfect a creature as they told him Madame Weiss was. At this time Jeanne was only twenty-one, and in the full possession of her powers, physical and mental.

Felix Roques had no difficulty in making her acquaintance. In common with the principal employés of the company that was constructing the railway, he was invited to a garden-party at Madame Weiss's, and there he was introduced to her by her husband. For some extraordinary reason the sight of Felix Roques aroused in Madame Weiss's breast all those doubtful

passions which had lain dormant since her flight from Nice. In a moment she was Jeanne Daniloff again. She fell straightway in love with the handsome engineer. Home, husband, children and reputation became as nothing to her. She dropped the mask and was the wild child of nature again. All the blood of her fanatical, revolutionary ancestors coursed through her veins, warmed by the balmy African sun.

She was really in love at last. That was what she told herself. She had married Captain Weiss to escape from the dreary boarding-house and the commonplace persons her grandmother catered for. She had tolerated him because he gave her social position, and she had accepted boredom because she wished to be with her children. But now she was in love, and Felix Roques, whose features were regular without making him startlingly handsome, fell under the spell of the fateful eyes, and was never the same man again.

The lovers had many secret meetings, and even when they met at parties could not conceal their affection. Friends warned Weiss; but he only laughed at them. Was not his wife the most religious woman in Oran? Had he not the evidence of his own senses that she was devoted to him and to their little boy and girl? "You are talking nonsense, my friend," he would answer calmly, and go about his duties, and once, to show his confidence in his wife, asked Felix Roques to take her to an evening party because business would detain him at his office.

The time came, however, when Madame Weiss and Felix Roques decided that it was impossible for either of them to be content with simple dalliance. The hypnotized engineer declared that Jeanne must give herself completely to him.

The suggestion was met with a pleased laugh. Jeanne liked a strong, determined lover, and not a milksop of a husband who let her have her own way in everything.

I will give her own description of this scene with her lover. It reveals the temperament of the woman in a remarkable way.

"I loved Monsieur Roques as the master of my thoughts, of my intelligence, of my body, of every fibre of my being, as a master whom I worshipped, and in whose presence I myself ceased to exist," she wrote. "When he asked me for the first time to appoint him an assignation we were walking with some other people. Instead of saying yes or no I took out a coin and said to him, 'I don't wish to take on myself the responsibility of a decision; you know that if once we begin to love it will be no light thing for me. I shall lead you far, perhaps farther than you think. If it comes down heads it shall be yes; if tails, no.' He looked very astonished; he blushed very deeply and said, 'So be it.' I spun the coin; it came down heads, and I was his."

The astounding nature of this female criminal is proved by the fact that to celebrate her downfall she had a ring engraved with the date, November 13, 1889!

Once she was committed to him her love became a mania. She wrote to him daily, and at night, when she had superintended the putting to bed of her children, she would sit down beside their cot and scribble pages of ecstatic praise of the young engineer.

Some of those letters have been preserved, and I will give one or two specimens.

"Dearest," she wrote a fortnight after she had betrayed her husband, "you do not know how I hold to life now. Does it not promise to me in the future days of radiant happiness, intimacy, affection growing daily stronger, with you, my beloved, you to whom I am proud to belong, you for whom I am capable of any sacrifice, any act of devotion? How I love you, Felix! Take all the kisses I can give you and many more. I embrace you with all the strength of my being.—Your wife, Jeanne."

Several months passed, and everybody in the district except Weiss knew of the intimacy between his wife and Roques. The infatuated man refused to believe a word against her, and his wife rewarded him by eventually coming to the conclusion that he was in her way, and that she must "remove" him in order to attain to the fullest happiness with Felix Roques.

The guilty couple often discussed the possibility of murdering Weiss without having to pay the penalty. Like everybody else they had been fascinated by the lurid English drama known as "The Maybrick Case." They had read full details of the "removing" of James Maybrick by arsenic, and the very complete French reports of the sensational Liverpool trial introduced Jeanne Weiss to many of the mysteries of arsenical poisoning. She knew that there were ways of obtaining poison without having to name that dread word, and when the fatal step was resolved on she voted for Fowler's solution as the medium.

A remarkable correspondence led up to the opening act of the drama. She sent Roques a letter, in which she said, "I am beset with sad and depressing thoughts. What I am about to do is very ugly."

Later she wrote, "I prefer Fowler's solution to begin with. It is agreed, Felix. You shall be obeyed. Have I ever hesitated before anything except the desertion of my children? Crimes against the law don't trouble me at all. It is only crimes against Nature that revolt me. I am a worshipper of Nature."

Another remarkable reference to the forthcoming attempt on her husband's life must be quoted, "I have been playing the Danse Macabre as a duet. My nerves must be affected, for it produced a gloomy effect upon me. I thought of death and of those who are about to die. Can it be that this feeling will return to me? But it is so sweet to think that I am working for our nest."

The last letter she penned before the actual poisoning began was an outburst of love and hysteria.

"Oh, Felix, love me, for the hideousness of my task glares at me. I want to close my heart and my soul and my eyes. I want to banish the recollection of what he has done for me, for I worship you. I feel such a currency of complete intimacy between you and me that words seem unnecessary. We read each other's thoughts as in an open book. To arrest this current would be to arrest my life. I may shudder at what I am doing after it is done, but go back I cannot. Comfort and sustain me; help me to get over the inevitable moments of depression, bind me under your yoke. Make me drunk with your caresses, for therein lies your own power. I will be yours, whatever happens. So long as you give me your orders I will carry them out. But it seems to me I am doing wrong. I love you terribly."

Weiss became ill in October, 1890, mysteriously ill, for the local doctor was greatly puzzled. The patient's young wife—she was only twenty-two—nursed him with apparent devotion. She would allow no one else to give him his food, and, of course, her reason for this was the fact that no one else could be relied upon to mix arsenic with it!

When friends of the family called Jeanne's distress touched their hearts. She was implored not to risk a breakdown herself by overdoing the day and night nursing of her ailing husband, and they advised her to employ professional help. With a wan smile Jeanne announced her determination to nurse him tenderly herself, and sacrifice her own life if necessary for him. There had been adverse rumours concerning Jeanne Weiss in Oran and the neighbourhood, but in the face of this unexampled devotion to her husband they seemed to be the inventions of unscrupulous enemies.

The doctor grew more puzzled. Just when his patient seemed to be improving he would have a relapse, and there was a curious ill-luck about the ministrations of Madame Weiss. He did not see that Jeanne was only acting the part of the distressed and anxious wife. It was her pale face and tearful manner that kept his eyes closed to the truth.

It happened, however, that Weiss had a secretary, Guerry, whose wife was a friend of Mademoiselle Castaing, the postmistress at Ain-Fezza, a lady whose bump of curiosity was abnormally developed, for she was in the habit of passing her time by opening the letters that came through her office, and reading the contents.

Mademoiselle, in fact, knew more about the intrigue between Madame Weiss and Felix Roques than anyone else, and it was only by exercising the rarest self-control that she refrained from publishing far and wide the news that Roques had gone to Spain to be out of the way when Weiss died, and that Madame Weiss was to join him later in Madrid with her children. She knew also that months before Jeanne had refused to elope with Roques, because that would have meant parting from her children, the custody of whom would be given to her deserted husband by the Court. It was because she wished to keep her children that she decided to murder her husband instead of simply leaving him.

Guerry, the secretary, was devoted to his employer. When Weiss became worse he reported the fact to Madame Guerry, and that lady sniffed meaningly and finally blurted out the gossip she had heard from the postmistress.

Instantly the secretary's suspicions were aroused. He felt certain that Jeanne was poisoning her husband, and when on October 9 his wife hinted that Madame Weiss had posted an important letter addressed to Felix Roques at Madrid, and that the letter was still

lying in Mademoiselle Castaing's post office, he promptly went down to see the lady whose curiosity was the direct means of saving a wronged man's life.

It was, of course, against the regulations for the postmistress to discuss her duties with outsiders, and Guerry, unwilling to put her in an embarrassing position, cut the Gordian knot by stealing Madame Weiss's letter. When he got home he read it, and a more remarkable document was never penned.

"You may as well know what a fearful time I am going through at this moment—in what a nightmare I live," Jeanne wrote. "Monsieur has been in bed four days, and the best half of my stock is used up. He fights it—fights it by his sheer vitality and instinct of self-preservation, so that he seems to absorb emetics and never drains a cup or a glass to its dregs. The doctor, who came yesterday, could find no disease. 'He's a madman, a hypochondriac,' he said. 'Since he seems to want to be sick, give him some ipecacuanha, and don't worry. There's nothing seriously the matter with him.'

"The constant sickness obliges me to administer the remedy in very small doses. I can't go beyond twenty drops without bringing on vomiting. Yesterday from five in the morning until four in the afternoon I have done nothing but empty basins, clean sheets, wash his face, and hold him down in the bed during his paroxysms of sickness. At night when I have got away for a moment I have put my head on Mademoiselle Castaing's shoulder and sobbed like a child. I am afraid, afraid that I haven't got enough of the remedy left, and that I shan't be able to bring it off. Couldn't you send me some by parcel post to the railway station of Ain-Fezza? Can't you send four or five pairs of children's socks with the bottle? I'll take care to get rid of the wrapper. Hide the bottle carefully.

"I'm getting thinner every day. I don't look well,

and I am afraid when I see you I shan't please you. Did you get the photograph ?

"Forgive my handwriting, but I am horribly nervous. I adore you."

The secretary handed the letter to the Public Prosecutor at Oran, and immediately Jeanne Weiss was arrested. The police were only just in time. Another day's delay and Weiss must have died, for the doctors had to work desperately before they could report that he was mending. When she was put in prison Jeanne tried to commit suicide, but a strong emetic preserved her life. Then followed a genuine illness, and for six months she was in the prison infirmary.

She had been allowed to take her infant with her, but it sickened in goal and died, greatly to her distress, for although Jeanne could plot to receive arsenic with which to poison her husband, and could ask her lover to hide the bottle in children's socks, she was devoted to her babies. A curious contradiction, yet it was because of this that, instead of deserting Weiss, she chose rather to poison him.

A perusal of Madame Weiss's papers left no doubt in the minds of the authorities that Felix Roques was her guilty accomplice, and the services of the Spanish police were utilized to effect his arrest in Madrid. Roques, however, had no intention of facing the music, and he contrived to smuggle a revolver into the Spanish goal, and with it he blew out his brains. The young Russian woman was left, therefore, to answer alone the serious charge of having attempted to murder her husband.

The trial did not take place until the last week in May, 1891, when Jeanne Weiss was just twenty-three. She had, indeed, lived her life. In experience and intrigue she was an old woman, and it was hard to credit the story of her career as laid before judge and jury by the prosecutor. During her incarceration she had composed a sort of autobiography in which she attempted

to put all the responsibility on Felix Roques, and when tired of that she persuaded herself that her husband had forgiven her, and that he would save her from punishment by giving evidence on her behalf. It was sheer invention, but it enabled her to enter the Court without a tremor, and feel hopeful of an acquittal.

The trial was conducted with all the emotion of which a French Court can be capable, and had it not been for the proofs in the prisoner's own handwriting her youth and her "fatal eyes" might have saved her from conviction. Jeanne's chief hope was that the sight of her distress might reawaken the love her husband first bore for her, the love that had once caused him to quarrel with his own mother. But Weiss had been sickened to the soul by the realization of her treachery. He could not look upon her without shuddering with horror, and from the moment he had been convinced that she had tried to murder him he declined to give her his name. Henceforth she was Jeanne Daniloff, and not Madame Weiss, and he would not permit anyone to speak of her as his wife.

Jeanne, who had decided to commit suicide if she was convicted, came into Court with a handkerchief which she constantly pressed against her face. No one knew that in the corner of it was a piece of cigarette paper which contained a dose of strychnine. This was to be her last resource if the verdict of the jury went against her.

The critical moment came when Weiss stepped into the witness-box. Now that Felix Roques was dead Weiss was the only person who could tell the inner history of the intrigue. Jeanne hoped that he would suppress everything likely to damage her, and all the time he was being questioned she kept her eyes on him.

But it was too late. Weiss was an older and a wiser, if sadder man now. Jeanne's eyes were no longer capable of hypnotizing him, and he simply told the

truth. When he was given permission to leave the box he turned abruptly towards the jury and addressed them.

" I desire, gentlemen," he said, " to make the following declaration : I speak that I may reply to certain calumnies that have appeared in the press. I have never forgiven Jeanne Daniloff. I do not, and I never will, forgive her. Henceforth she is nothing to me. Whatever her fate, I stay near my children. I only wish never to hear her name again."

That statement sealed the doom of the accused. She uttered a gasp of terror, and would have fallen had not the wardress clutched her, and although the trial continued for several hours longer she scarcely understood what was happening.

It was at four o'clock in the morning when the jury returned a verdict of guilty, " with extenuating circumstances," and but for the latter the convict would have been sentenced to death.

The fatal eyes had, in fact, saved her ; but Jeanne Weiss had no desire for life. To her, death was far more preferable than existence within prison walls, and when the judge's sentence was still ringing in her ears she bit her handkerchief as though trying to steady her nerves, though in reality she was swallowing the dose of strychnine she had concealed in the hem. A request to the wardress for a glass of water was instantly complied with, and Jeanne then washed the fatal poison down. A few moments later she was shrieking in agony.

They carried her into an adjoining room, and a doctor administered an emetic, but already the deadly dose was accomplishing its task. Jeanne Weiss was dying, and those who had assisted to bring her to justice stood around her as she passed into another world.

The manner of her going was in keeping with her character. Wild, turbulent, passionate, fierce and unscrupulous, Jeanne Daniloff was a revolutionary, one

who rebelled against the laws of mankind. She took her own life gladly, and her last words were references to her children and to the man for whom she had sacrificed so much.

She appeared anxious to spare her children the disgrace of having a convict for a mother, but it was really her husband's repudiation and the knowledge of her lover's death that had inspired her to revise the sentence of the Court and execute herself.

CHAPTER V

MADAME RACHEL

THE BEAUTY SPECIALIST

ANYBODY who has sufficient self-assurance to set up as a "beauty specialist" will never want for clients as long as there are middle-aged and ugly women in existence and vanity continues to be one of the most common weaknesses of humanity. But when Rachel Leverson, an unscrupulous London Jewess, claimed to have discovered a process by which she could make members of her own sex beautiful for ever she struck out into a new line, and one that proved eminently successful until the police intervened.

Madame Rachel, as she called herself, had no pretensions to good looks. She was, to tell the truth, repulsive in appearance, being stout, with a greasy skin, irregular features, eyes that repelled, and a manner that was generally familiar and always irritating. But just as men will buy a hair-restorer from a bald-headed barber so will women flock to an ugly creature to learn the secret of beauty. Madame Rachel was ugly in mind as well as in body; she was rapacious and unscrupulous, and yet for years she prospered as a "beauty doctor."

It was a very risky business that Madame Rachel brought into existence, but, despite her audacious frauds, it was not without difficulty that she was convicted in a court of law and punished for her crimes.

Before starting as a "beauty specialist" Rachel

Leverson had tried fortune-telling, but the profits had been too small and clients too few, and she quickly retired from it to strike out on new lines, and she did not have to wait very long before her bank balance justified her enterprise.

The woman's headquarters were in a house at the corner of Maddox Street and New Bond Street, and were, therefore, right in the heart of fashionable London.

Her methods were a mixture of quackery, blackmail, subserviency and bullying, and, realizing that most people do not value anything which is not costly, she charged enormous fees. Whenever she quoted them she did so in a reluctant manner, as if to suggest that she personally got nothing out of the business, and was, in fact, really a philanthropist. Of course, she relied principally on her knowledge of the weaknesses of her sex, and those would-be clients whose financial position obviously precluded them from adding to her profits she skilfully used to advertise her merits.

On one occasion the widow of a Civil Servant, a lady in the fifties, who had lost her good looks many years earlier in the hot suns of India, applied to Madame Rachel to be made beautiful for ever, being unaware that the Jewess charged a hundred guineas for the preliminary treatment only and that she required a thousand guineas for the full course. But as the lady was in society Madame Rachel did not drive her away with contumely, as she had persons of low degree. She merely surveyed her caller, and then announced that she could not accept less than five hundred guineas "on account."

"You should understand," said Madame Rachel, leaning back in an arm-chair, and speaking in an impressive manner, "that the process I have discovered is known only to myself, and that it is a very expensive one to work. I have to charge high fees not only for

"MADAME RACHEL"

that reason, but to make sure that only ladies of rank and fortune will patronize me. *Ladies* will keep my secret, I know. If they didn't I should be out of work" —here she laughed—"in a month. I am sorry that you cannot afford the course of treatment, for I am sure that it would do all you require. Still, it can't be helped."

The widow went off to tell her acquaintances, and, incidentally, to get half a dozen friends to lend her sufficient money to undergo the expensive treatment. In return she promised that as soon as she had discovered the secret process she would reveal it to them, and then they could make themselves beautiful without having to spend another penny or consult the beauty doctor.

A week later the widow paid Madame Rachel the five hundred guineas, and at once began the treatment. It continued for a month, during which time the victim drank all sorts of medicines, had innumerable baths, sat in dark rooms for hours, and painted her skin with vile concoctions. Instead of becoming more beautiful, she got even uglier, and at last she came to the conclusion that she was being trifled with. As soon as she realized this she demanded the return of her five hundred guineas.

Madame Rachel, who had hitherto acted the part of the sleek, half-obsequious, half-familiar friend, burst into a roar of laughter when the request was made, and, towering over the widow, with her greasy face distorted with passion, and her heavy thick hands clenched, she cursed, threatened and jeered.

"I will not give you more than a minute to leave my premises," she shouted, in conclusion, and she looked capable of murdering her dissatisfied client. "I suppose you think that because I am an unprotected woman trying to earn an honest living that you can bluff me? I have spent the whole of your fee on the

treatment and haven't made a penny profit, and now—"

"That's a lie," cried the courageous widow. "Don't shout at me, woman. I am going straight to my solicitor to instruct him to issue a writ against you."

Madame Rachel laughed horribly.

"Splendid," she cried, clapping her hands. "Nothing would please me better. I should revel in such a law case, and so would your friends. Wouldn't they laugh when they heard that the ugliest woman in England was so stupidly vain as not to know that only a miracle could make her beautiful! How they will jeer at you! You'll be the laughing stock of London! I can imagine how the papers will report the case. And the headlines! It will be a treat to listen to the cross-examination by my counsel, who will know all that has passed between you and me. Oh, by all means go to your solicitor, and as a personal favour I implore you to bring an action against me. It would be the best possible advertisement for my business."

The widow went, but the writ never came, for on second thoughts she decided that it would be better to forego the luxury of revenge than to hold herself up to ridicule. Madame Rachel had anticipated this, and it was the real reason why she dealt only with persons of good social position who would not dare to invite publicity.

Another victim was the wife of a man who was a prominent member of the Conservative Party. She had heard a lot about Madame Rachel, and she decided to seek her advice as to the best method of improving her skin, which was unpleasantly sallow. The swindler pretended that she had an infallible remedy for this, and when the statesman's wife called she did not hesitate to guarantee a cure, provided her instructions were followed. Madame Rachel advised daily baths and the use of certain cosmetics, and for these a very stiff fee was paid in advance. Three times a week the

lady came to the establishment to undergo the treatment, and Madame Rachel was always in attendance, with a huge smile and plenty of flattery.

It happened that in the course of conversation Madame Rachel had learned from her client that she was taking the treatment unknown to her husband because she wished to give him a pleasant surprise. Husband and wife were as deeply in love with one another as they had been on their wedding day, and the lady lived only to please him, and she thought that if she suddenly presented herself before him with a beautiful skin he would be enchanted. The information greatly interested the swindler, whose greedy eyes had noticed that the lady wore on her fingers diamond rings which could not have cost less than a thousand pounds.

During the first week of the treatment, which mainly consisted of taking baths, the client wore her rings all the time. But Madame Rachel pretended that they hampered her process, and so she insisted upon the lady discarding them with her clothes before entering the bath. The request was complied with—the "beauty specialist" had a wonderful power over her customers—and as a result the "patient" never saw her rings again. When she missed them after returning from the bath, she immediately rang the bell and complained to the maid. The next moment Madame Rachel burst into the room in a rage and began to pour a stream of filthy abuse upon her client, who saw at once that the "beauty specialist" was the thief, and taxed her with the crime. Instead of repudiating the accusation, she retorted by declaring that unless the lady went at once and gave no more trouble she would declare that she had been to her house to meet a gentleman by appointment who was not her husband.

"You never told your husband that you've been coming here," she screamed triumphantly, noticing the look of dismay and fright on her client's face. "It's

been a secret to him. What would he say if I told him, and my assistants confirmed me, that you'd been keeping clandestine appointments with a lover? Go and let me hear no more of your alleged losses, or it'll be the worse for you."

That lady was not very wise, for she did not tell her husband at once how she had been tricked. Had she consulted him immediately he would have taken steps to recover the jewellery, but it was too late to do anything when she admitted how she had allowed herself to be robbed.

All the time there was a steady flow of clients who paid enormous fees and solemnly went through the farcial programme which Madame Rachel guaranteed would confer everlasting beauty upon them. They were mainly middle-aged widows and old maids, who fancied that certain distinguished men of their acquaintance had grown "interested" in them, and would propose if only they were a little more attractive or appeared just a few years younger. When clients were without eligible male friends the "beauty specialist" undertook to supply them with husbands for a consideration. Indeed, there was nothing she would not promise in return for a substantial sum of money.

Her strongest protection was the knowledge that her patrons feared ridicule more than the loss of their money. Dissatisfied clients occasionally created scenes at the beauty shop, and then Madame Rachel treated them to language which sent them scampering from her premises. But the majority took their disappointment quietly, not even registering a protest when after months of "treatment" they found themselves worse than when they had started.

Meanwhile, the money rolled in, and Madame Rachel, who had once told fortunes in vile public-houses at a penny a time, now sported a carriage and pair, and was frequently seen in the most fashionable restaurants.

When strangers saw her they invariably inquired as to the identity of the vulgar creature, and the usual answer was, "She's the famous Madame Rachel, who is the greatest beauty specialist in the world. She has accomplished miracles, I am told." Thus was her fame extended.

But suddenly the number of patrons began to diminish perceptibly, greatly to the alarm of the swindler, whose great ambition was to provide such handsome dowries for her two daughters as would win for them titled husbands. She had already saved thousands of pounds, but she required much more for her purpose, and it was quite by accident she discovered how to improve upon her swindle.

A certain woman of thirty, plain and uncouth, came to her to be changed into a beauty. She had the money to pay for the process, and Madame Rachel took her in hand. Alice Maynard was one of those women who never attract men, and she was fully conscious of the fact. When she confided her griefs to the "sympathetic" sharper she was at once promised a husband with a title on the condition that she would reward her benefactress for her trouble. Miss Maynard cheerfully promised anything, and from time to time handed over various sums, ranging from ten guineas to a hundred.

When informed that the woman's savings were exhausted Madame Rachel introduced her to a man who called himself the "Hon. George Sylvester." He proposed at once, was accepted, and married the girl shortly afterwards. Then the "Hon. George," having borrowed fifty pounds from his bride, disappeared, and it was only when the weeping woman consulted a book on the peerage with a view to communicating with her husband's relatives that she discovered that there was no titled family of the name of Sylvester. Later a solicitor elicited the information for her that the man she had married was a bookmaker's tout, who had

escorted other ladies to the altar, and for whom the police were searching.

Alice Maynard, broken-hearted and ashamed, retired to the country, to die within a few months, leaving Madame Rachel in peaceful possession of the seven hundred pounds she had had from her. Madame had paid the "Hon. George Sylvester" five pounds to pose as the son of a peer and marry the forlorn young lady, and, as she anticipated, it proved a cheap method for getting rid of her.

The success, from Madame Rachel's point of view, of this affair caused her to develop it on a larger scale, and very soon another victim presented herself for the purpose of being plucked. As this deluded creature seemed likely to yield thousands of pounds, the "beauty specialist" prepared to reap a rich harvest.

One evening a thin, spare, scraggy little woman with yellow hair, obviously dyed, painted face and eyebrows, and the affected giggle of a schoolgirl, called at the beauty shop in Bond Street. She introduced herself as Mrs. Borradaile, the widow of Colonel Borradaile, and she asked that she might be made beautiful for ever, because, although fifty, she had the heart of a child, and she wished to marry again, if possible.

Even Madame Rachel, with all her experience, had the greatest difficulty in preventing herself from laughing at this human caricature, but as Mrs. Borradaile made no secret of her strong financial position she entered seriously into negotiations. Her first question was about the amout the widow wished to spend, and the answer was that she did not want to pay more than a hundred pounds.

Madame Rachel pretended to be satisfied, and there and then she accepted ten pounds on account, a sum she had often before refused with scorn. But she knew that Mrs. Borradaile could be bled if properly treated, and she proved the correctness of this view by getting

from her in the course of the first month four hundred guineas.

The widow was crazy to become beautiful, and, when chance enabled the swindler to get Mrs. Borradaile completely in her power, the rest was easy. The two women were discussing the treatment in Madame Rachel's private room when a maid entered with a card.

Madame Rachel read the name on it with surprise.

"Lord Ranelagh!" she exclaimed, and her astonishment was genuine, for she did not know the peer. "I wonder why he has come! It can't be that he wishes to be a client."

Mrs. Borradaile was greatly impressed by the rank of the visitor, and during the quarter of an hour the "beauty specialist" was absent from the room she thought of nothing else except the exclusiveness of her visiting-list. Evidently the woman's oft-repeated claim to be in society was true.

Mrs. Borradaile knew nothing of Lord Ranelagh's reputation. He was an idler of doubtful habits, who, with advancing years, could not lose the delusion that he was a lady-killer. He spent his time running after women, and his call on Madame Rachel was simply inspired by curiosity. He did not know the woman, but he wanted to hear something of her wonderful method, rightly guessing that he would not be repulsed on account of his social position.

Madame Rachel received him with flattering cordiality, and invited him to come again. The peer accepted the invitation, and in that moment the "beauty specialist," who knew how to take advantage of an opportunity, evolved quite a brilliant scheme for the discomfiture of the widow who was waiting her return.

Affecting enthusiasm and surprise, she sank into the chair beside Mrs. Borradaile, looked at her meaningly, seized her hand, and pressed it between her own.

"I congratulate you, my dear," she whispered, to

Mrs. Borradaile's unfeigned amazement. "You have achieved a wonderful conquest."

"I—I don't understand," Mrs. Borradaile stammered, thinking that Madame Rachel had gone mad.

"Lord Ranelagh!" she replied, with another pressure of her hot, fat hands. "He really came to see you. He's been following you to my establishment every day, and he called just now to inquire about you." She giggled, and her large black eyes twinkled. "Lord Ranelagh is the wealthiest bachelor peer in England," she whispered. "I congratulate you, Mrs. Borradaile, for when the treatment is finished, and you have satisfied his lordship's standard of beauty, he will make you Lady Ranelagh. He told me so in confidence, and you must never let a soul know that I've imparted the secret to you. What a great future is yours!"

From that moment Mrs. Borradaile was Madame Rachel's body and soul. The foolish woman actually agreed to pay three thousand pounds to be made beautiful, and she paid six hundred pounds on account. She was too vain to entertain the slightest doubts as to Madame Rachel's truthfulness, and when she was introduced to Lord Ranelagh at her own request, and a few commonplace remarks passed between them, she was absolutely convinced that the peer had fallen in love with her, and that when the "beauty specialist" had finished with her she would become the "Right Hon. Lady Ranelagh."

It was a very remarkable "courtship," and it is sometimes difficult to believe, judging by her part in it, that Mrs. Borradaile was quite sane, although later she recovered sufficiently to start the criminal proceedings that brought the "beauty shop" to an end. But during the period when she was daily undergoing baths and using up a large amount of cosmetics she swallowed every story the adventuress told her, and allowed herself to be led by the nose.

No courtship being complete without love-letters, the ingenious Madame Rachel had not the heart to deprive Mrs. Borradaile of the pleasure of hearing from her lover. It was true that Lord Ranelagh had no intention of marrying Mrs. Borradaile, for he was only interested in her because he was curious to see whether the "beauty doctor" could succeed in transforming the ugly little widow into a handsome woman. However, Madame Rachel had her own way of producing love-letters, and she showered them upon Mrs. Borradaile, who believed that they all came from the peer who had fallen in love with her at first sight.

Many of the letters were published in the papers subsequently, and created astonishment and mirth. It was never actually proved who wrote them, because Madame Rachel always insisted upon taking the originals from the widow, though allowing her to keep copies.

One specimen of the curious correspondence will suffice to show the sort of stuff Mrs. Borradaile was willing to swallow. The term "granny" applies to Madame Rachel, who bestowed this endearing term upon herself:

"My only-dearly beloved Mary,

"The little perfume-box and the pencil-case belonged to my sainted mother. She died with them in her hand. When she was a schoolgirl it was my father's first gift to her. Granny has given the watch and locket to me again. Your coronet is finished, my love. Granny said you had answered my last letter, but you have forgotten to send it. I forgot yesterday was Ash Wednesday. Let old granny arrange the time, as we have little to spare.

"My dearest one, what is the matter with the old woman? She seems out of sorts. We must manage to keep her in good temper for our own sakes, because she has to manage all for us, and I should not have had

the joy of your love had it not been for her. Darling love, Mary, my sweet one, all will be well in a few hours. The dispatches have arrived. I will let you know when I hear from you, my heart's love. Bear up, my fond one. I shall be at your feet—those pretty feet that I love—and you may kick your ugly old donkey. Two letters, naughty little pet, and you have not answered one.

"With fond and devoted love,
"Yours, until death,
"William."

All the letters, inspired, it is certain, by Madame Rachel, were in this strain, and each one contained a warning not to offend her.

The letters the peer was alleged to have written also dropped hints that the woman's monetary demands were to be met without hesitation, and by way of compensation he was made to promise a fortune as well as a title for his bride. Sometimes Lord Ranelagh's letter requested Mrs. Borradaile to settle certain debts he owed Madame Rachel, and so artfully interspersed were his epistles with criticisms of her that Mrs. Borradaile never guessed that they were all forgeries, and very likely had been dictated by "granny" herself to her daughters.

Madame Rachel's constant advice to Mrs. Borradaile was to persevere with the treatment, and to start to collect jewellery, because Lord Ranelagh loved diamonds and pearls. The coronet mentioned in the letter quoted never had any existence, although the swindler was given eight hundred pounds to pay for it. She told Mrs. Borradaile that she was minding it for her, and the deluded woman accepted her assurance that it was quite safe.

The beauty shop in New Bond Street became Mrs. Borradaile's second home, because Madame Rachel

insisted that she should not do anything without consulting her. The widow was a gold mine to the adventuress. She parted with her money readily and cheerfully. Once Madame Rachel required two hundred guineas for a certain purpose, and, as she did not wish to draw a cheque on her own account, she told Mrs. Borradaile that she must purchase a carriage for her wedding, and have the Ranelagh arms painted upon it. The simple-minded and trusting widow did as she was told, but, of course, the carriage was never bought, Madame Rachel utilizing the cheque for her own needs.

It was the same with her trousseau. Mrs. Borradaile chose it, and gave Madame Rachel the money to settle with the tradespeople. Certain of the articles, having been delivered, had to be paid for, but the creature promptly pawned them all because they were of no use to her.

In the course of some months Mrs. Borradaile had bought and paid for jewellery, clothes, some choice pieces of furniture, a coronet and a carriage, and she was under the impression that Madame Rachel was minding them all for her. That was not surprising, seeing that when the swindler informed her that she and Lord Ranelagh were to be married by proxy she unhesitatingly accepted that extraordinary way of becoming a peeress. But Mrs. Borradaile was so delighted to think that some one had fallen in love with her that she was eager to believe anything.

However, a worm will turn, and when Madame Rachel had bled Mrs. Borradaile of nearly four thousand pounds as well as securing promises in writing to pay as much again, the widow suddenly woke up and consulted her solicitor. That hardheaded man of the world had no difficulty in proving to her that she had been the victim of a scandalous swindle, and he counselled an appeal to the law. Accordingly Madame Rachel was arrested

on a charge of having obtained money by false pretences, and was committed for trial at the Old Bailey.

The trial was a notable one, and attracted crowds to the court. Lord Ranelagh was given a seat on the bench, and when called as a witness he denied having met Mrs. Borradaile, and laughed at the idea that he had written the letters, copies of which were exhibited by the prosecution. Counsel for the defence cross-examined severely, and Mrs. Borradaile had a rough time at their hands, and as Madame Rachel noticed that the case was going favourably for her she began to assume a haughty attitude, reclining in the dock like a tragedy queen, and sniffing scornfully whenever any damaging statement was made by a witness for the other side.

Considering the overwhelming nature of the evidence for the prosecution it was a remarkable feat on the part of Madame Rachel's counsel that they should succeed in preventing the jury coming to a decision. The twelve good men and true took five hours to argue the case amongst themselves, and then had to announce that they were unable to agree.

Madame Rachel's smile of triumph when the trial was declared abortive was remarkable, and when the judge ordered a new trial at the next sessions, and assented to admitting the prisoner to bail, two sureties at five thousand pounds each, the "beauty specialist" had no difficulty in obtaining the necessary backing.

Her freedom, however, was destined to be short, for the second trial—which took place on September 21—25, 1868—ended disastrously for her.

The prosecution, represented by Mr. Sergeant Ballantine and Montague Williams and Douglas Straight, advanced no new facts, relying upon a repetition of the proof they had given at the first trial. But Madame Rachel's clever array of lawyers—Digby Seymour, Q.C., headed a legal team of four—were unable to

hoodwink a jury again. On this occasion the twelve men had no difficulty in arriving at an adverse decision, unanimously finding the prisoner guilty after an extraordinary summing-up by Mr. Commissioner Kerr. She was white to the lips and shaking with fear when she stood up to receive sentence of five years' penal servitude, and she could not leave the dock without the aid of the wardresses. The last the packed court saw of the ugly old hag was a deathly white face and a pair of black eyes gleaming unnaturally.

She served her time, and soon after her release, with amazing impudence, started business again as a " beauty specialist." Undeterred by previous experience, she sought for another victim of the Borradaile type, and, finding one, swindled her with cynical effrontery until the dupe turned against her. Then followed another trial for obtaining money and jewels by false pretences, and again the sentence was five years' penal servitude. Madame Rachel was convicted on April 11th, 1878, and she died in prison.

CHAPTER VI

THE MONTE CARLO TRUNK MURDERESS

WHEN a young woman deliberately embarks upon a career of crime she is certain of a fair amount of success, provided she is pretty enough to attract men to her side. A beauty, however black her record may be, need never want for male assistance. If she is clever and designing she can, as a rule, lay her plans with such discretion that if arrest follows she is able to plead that she was merely the tool of a designing man.

The trick has succeeded nine times out of ten. Juries naturally pity the "weaker sex," and at the Old Bailey I have seen women let off with a few months' imprisonment whilst their really less culpable partners in wrongdoing have been sent to penal servitude for no other reason than that they were of the masculine gender. Thus, it will be admitted that the female criminal has at least one advantage over her male colleague.

But Marie Goold never was a beauty. As a young girl she was plain-looking and her manner repelled. She made no friends, and the passage of time did not bring any improvement in her appearance. She was clever and resourceful, however, and when a desire to mix in fashionable circles and to acquire riches quickly determined her to turn criminal she relied solely on her brains and not on her face. Yet she married three times, and on each occasion above her own position, and from first to last she always had at least one man

in tow who was completely dominated by her and obeyed her implicitly.

Her first marriage was the result of pique on her part. There was a youth in her native village—she was born in France—who for some quaint reason fell in love with her. He may have admired her vitriolic tongue and her fearlessness, but the fact remains that he proposed. Marie Girodin refused him, but the youth did not tell his parents of his failure, and they, in their anxiety to save him, began a campaign of calumny against the "charmer." It was a fatal move on their part, for Marie, just to spite them, married their son and then discarded him, because she decided that he could be of no use to her. He was wretched and unhappy, but so hypnotized by his wife that when she returned to him after a long absence he was almost delirious with joy, and promptly handed over his savings. Marie had been in Paris and London in the meantime, but she only remained at home for three months. Her husband died suddenly, and the widow immediately went abroad again. It was perhaps merely a coincidence that the young man expired just when Marie had made up her mind that she would accept the gallant English army officer who had been courting her under the impression that she was free.

Once more Marie ventured on the matrimonial sea. Her second marriage was an improvement on the first, and for a while she was content to spend money and enjoy herself. The captain's means, however, would not stand the strain, and Marie left for a Continental tour by herself. She stopped for a couple of days at Nice and then departed; and when she had gone two thousand pounds' worth of jewellery disappeared with her. There was no proof of her guilt, and she was not molested, but Marie's poverty ceased abruptly, and for a few months she was able to indulge herself.

Then the captain died, for Marie had, curiously

enough, grown very tired of him too. His ideas of honour and honesty had disturbed her. She knew that he sternly disapproved of theft and forgery, and to obtaining money by false pretences—one of her little hobbies—the captain was fanatically opposed. Therefore, his death came as a welcome release to her. Black suited her, and if money was scarce she had a collection of jewellery which was her precaution against a "rainy day."

She was now nearer thirty than twenty, and it required all the art of which she was capable to make herself presentable. Her face was thin and marked, her eyes were black and repellent, and her skin sallow. People shrank from her until she began to talk, for then her rippling voice poured forth stories of adventures in which names of famous men and women in France and Great Britain appeared with her own.

Strangers were impressed by her. She never asserted that she was on intimate terms with Presidents and Cabinet Ministers, but she inferred it, and the credulous crowded round her. Once she got them interested she held them. She was clever enough to be able to do that.

But talking did not produce money, and Marie, who owed thousands, began to feel a draught. She did not ask for loans. Such a procedure would be tantamount to suicide, but she resorted to trickery to replenish her purse. Thus she flattered and coaxed an English lady into giving her the position of secretary-companion. Marie protested that she only wanted companionship herself, and that she would not accept a salary, as she had plenty of money lying at her bankers. The English woman, captivated by her chatter, agreed, and a few weeks later was lamenting the loss of six hundred pounds which had "gone astray" while she and her "companion-secretary" were travelling to San Sebastian.

The day after the disaster Marie told her that she

had been summoned to Paris to consult her lawyers about some property left to her by her husband. She parted from her employer with tears in her eyes, but she did not go to the French capital. She fixed upon Marseilles, and, taking up her headquarters in the leading hotel there, had a riotous time on the money she had stolen from the English lady.

The six hundred pounds and Marie were soon separated, and once more she was penniless. She still had her jewellery, but she was loath to sell it, and in desperation she set on foot various swindles. They all came to nothing, and at last, feeling that the police were watching her, she became panic-stricken, and fled to London. They could not harm her there, as she was, by virtue of her second marriage, a British subject.

In London she was friendless, while hotel managers were hard-hearted and would allow no credit. Poor Marie was compelled to work, and, of course, she hated the prospect, but necessity compelled her to dispose of her jewellery, and with the money to start a dressmaker's establishment. She found a coy-looking shop in an unobtrusive street in the West End of London, and with a small and select stock began her new career.

The woman, a criminal to the finger-tips, utterly unscrupulous and merciless, had no intention of settling down to the drudgery of a dressmaker's life. She regarded her establishment as a spider must regard his web. Money was not to be earned legitimately, but by trickery. Money and more money was all Marie thought of, and, with the aid of her crafty tongue, she extracted various sums from trusting and sympathetic clients.

She could ingratiate herself into the confidences of middle-aged English ladies who were losing their attractions by grossly flattering them, and, because she was no rival so far as looks were concerned, they became friends of hers rather than clients.

Her first exploit in London was a great success. A well-to-do woman of fifty, who had been fascinated by "Madame's" promise to keep her young, called to see her, and found the dressmaker in tears. The usual question ensued, and then Marie whispered that the broker's men were in the next room, and that she was ruined. The sympathetic customer paid the amount which Marie said was owing, and as the whole story was a lie the "dressmaker" was sixty pounds to the good.

Hitherto Marie's criminal activities had centred on obtaining money by means of fraud. Her first two husbands may have died under suspicious circumstances, but it was only suspicion after all, and it was not until she was a British subject and a resident in the West End of London that she soared to greater criminal heights.

The widow began to think of marrying again. A husband would be decidedly useful in London. The English were inclined to regard her with suspicion because she had no man attached to her, and Marie meant to abandon the dressmaking business because the comparatively small sums which she obtained from confiding customers were of little use to her. She wanted thousands now, for she had become a confirmed gambler, and the luck as a rule went against her. She therefore, as a preliminary, commenced a campaign to find a husband, and she had not to wait long for success.

It was said at the time of the final catastrophe that Marie first met Vere Goold when the latter called to pay an account for a relative, but there was no confirmation of this, and there is reason to believe that she made his acquaintance at a restaurant in the West End.

Vere Goold was an Irishman of good family, who devoted his time to absorbing intoxicating liquors. A man of education and some ability, drink and drugs

had robbed him of all his will power. He had been sent to London by friends and relations who were anxious for him to reform, and they made him a small allowance, hoping that he would find it impossible to live on it, and would, therefore, seek some form of employment.

Goold, however, was content to take the part of the shabby genteel "loafer," and for some years he was well known in most of the taprooms in the West End. When he was in funds he was in the habit of entertaining acquaintances in one of the cheap Soho restaurants, but these rare appearances in the rôle of host were invariably marked by ejection from the particular restaurant. Now and then he paid a small fine at Marlborough Street for being "drunk and disorderly," but on the whole Vere Goold had only one enemy, and that was himself. He was otherwise quite inoffensive until he came into the life of the adventuress.

The moment she decided to become Vere Goold's wife there was no way of escape for him. The woman was a human snake, and he was the frightened, timid rabbit. She dosed him with liquor and did all the thinking for him. When she led him to the nearest register office he plaintively said "Yes" to everything, and it took his drink-soddened mind some hours to realize that he was a married man, the husband of Marie, the woman with the evil face and the tongue of honey.

Marie Goold was delighted with her third husband. She compiled a list of his relatives, most of them of good social position, and, what was more important, she discovered there was a baronetcy in the family, and that if only certain persons died her husband would succeed to it and she would become Lady Goold! Ambition and vanity caused her to make her husband assume the baronetcy. By now the dressmaking business had been disposed of, and the married couple had about a hundred pounds between them. Marie voted

for a protracted honeymoon on the Continent, and, to lend distinction to their adventures, it was as Sir Vere and Lady Goold that they left London for Paris, "her ladyship" plentifully stocked with clothes which she had obtained from the wholesale houses without troubling to pay for them.

But when their funds vanished they experienced many vicissitudes of fortune, and Vere Goold, who waited on his wife like a slave, came in for much abuse. He would listen meekly to her upbraidings, and then wander forth, hoping to meet an acquaintance on the boulevards whom he might "tap" for a few francs. They were turned out of several hotels and boarding-houses. Once Goold borrowed a little money and gave it to Marie. She promptly took a room at an hotel, and as the manager insisted upon cash down, even for their meals, she let her husband go without food, whilst she enjoyed the excellent cuisine of the hotel.

They experienced occasional bursts of sunshine when Marie succeeded in extracting loans from confiding hotel acquaintances, but the inevitable sequel to these minor triumphs was flight to escape prosecution for fraud. The helpless husband followed her about like a tame dog, and when she told him that she had found a way out of all their troubles he believed her, and declared his acquiescence in everything she said and did.

I have mentioned that Marie Goold was a gambler, and in the darkest hour she remembered Monte Carlo. She was positive that she knew the way to break the bank. Given a little capital, she was confident that she would make them both rich beyond the dreams of avarice.

The adventuress craved for big money now. For years she had lived by her wits, and the result was misery, mental and physical. She had swindled scores of acquaintances, and it was hardly safe for her to appear in London, Paris and other cities. She knew

that the police of several countries had her name on their books, and for all her cleverness she had nothing to show except a weak-minded drunkard of a husband and her own ill-nourished condition. But she felt certain that Monte Carlo would prove their salvation. It was her last hope. She had expended all other sources of income, and now everything would depend on her cleverness as a gambler and the system she had invented.

For ten days they were held up in Paris owing to lack of funds, but Vere Goold wrote pitiful letters to friends in England, and a few of them responded, while Marie, making the most of her assumed title of "Lady Goold," obtained on approval a diamond ring from a jeweller. She was to have it on approval for twenty-four hours, and then, if she decided to keep it, was to pay cash down. But before the twenty-four hours elapsed the ring was pawned and she and the "baronet" were in the express for the Riviera, exulting over the good time coming. She had worked out an infallible system with which she could smash the bank, and henceforth they were—so she assured him—to have no difficulty in living up to their "baronetcy."

Marie was so anxious to keep as much of her small store of money as possible for the tables in the Casino that she became economically minded, and, instead of going to an hotel, took apartments in a Villa. She sent for her niece to act as a sort of housekeeper, because she would have to spend her days in the gaming-rooms. The niece, who was only twenty-four, was delighted to accept the invitation. She had not experienced much pleasure in her life, and the prospect of a season at Monte Carlo enchanted her.

It is not difficult to guess Marie Goold's experiences as a would-be breaker of the bank at Monte Carlo. The "infallible system," which had worked out so well on paper, proved a delusion and a snare, and Marie

returned from the Casino in a towering rage with everybody. For hours her husband had patiently waited outside the Casino to accompany her home. He was not allowed to enter by his strong-minded wife, who had ordered him to hang about outside until she was tired of playing. Vere Goold would have willingly allowed her to use him as a door mat, and he was quite content to take her to the Casino and remain in the grounds until she was ready for him. He had a vague idea that his clever wife would overcome all difficulties, for he believed her to be a genius.

Four visits to the Casino resulted in Marie being penniless again. The position was desperate. They had obtained the rooms at the Villa Menesimy without the formality of rent in advance or references, the landlord having been overwhelmed by the honour of " Sir Vere and Lady Goold's " acquaintance. Nevertheless, at the end of the month he would demand what was owing, and the sum was so small that inability to pay it would arouse his suspicions, and then they would have to fly from Monte Carlo, and Marie would be unable to test her system further. But she refused to admit that her system was faulty. Her reverses she put down to sheer bad luck.

Marie had to search Monte Carlo for a likely victim to provide funds. In this way precious hours were wasted. She told her husband that she ought to be at the Casino coining money instead of lunching as cheaply as possible in expensive hotels and restaurants, but it was necessary for the vulture to go after her prey, and the loss of time could not be helped.

She achieved her object with characteristic cunning. One afternoon she " accidentally " stumbled against a lady in the hall of an hotel, and instantly apologized very humbly. From apology to general conversation was an easy step, and the stranger was fascinated by Marie's ready tongue. When they had made their

names known to one another, "Lady Goold" begged to be allowed to present her husband "Sir Vere," to Madame Levin, and the latter, who was the widow of a wealthy Stockholm merchant, gladly accorded permission. She had social ambitions, and she welcomed "Sir Vere and Lady Goold" with more than ordinary cordiality. Marie, fashionably dressed and with her sallow cheeks lightened by a skilful use of powder, deferred in the most alluring manner to the rich widow. That she was wealthy was obvious from her display of jewellery, for Madame Levin carried thousands of pounds worth with her and frankly invited the admiration of strangers.

Marie Goold thought that Madame Levin would prove a source of income, and she was, therefore, surprised and exasperated when she discovered that the lady was close-fisted. Instead of obtaining hundreds it took Marie a fortnight to borrow forty pounds from her rich friend, and in return for that small loan she had to bow and scrape to her, and agree with everything she said. In fact, the clever adventuress had to subordinate her own opinions to the clumsily-expressed and frequently irritating statements to which the widow gave vent.

Her experiences leading up to the borrowing of that forty pounds should have convinced her that Madame Levin would prove a worrying creditor. The loan eventually passed into the keeping of the owner of the Casino, and Marie once again had to try and "raise the wind."

It maddened her to think that Monte Carlo was crowded with wealthy persons of both sexes on whom she was unable to practise any of her money-raising tricks, simply because they would not have anything to do with her. "Sir Vere and Lady Goold" were for some unexplained reason at a discount, and squabbles and hysteria were of frequent occurrence at the Villa

Menesimy when Marie came back from the gaming-tables without a sou.

Then Madame Levin began to press for repayment, and when her debtor pleaded temporary embarrassment owing to non-receipt of a large remittance from her husband's agent in London she showed her teeth. Clearly Madame Levin regarded forty pounds as a very large sum, and she pestered " Lady Goold " every time they met. The adventuress was at her wit's end. She had to look pleasant and chat amiably with the rich widow, and ignore her insults, and yet she longed to get her white hands round the throat of her persecutor. She hated the Stockholm widow with a ferocity that was akin to madness, for Madame Levin was angrily demanding payment of the debt while Marie was actually in want of money to buy the necessaries of life.

The two women had a violent quarrel, and Marie must have unconsciously revealed something of her real self, for Madame Levin became afraid of her. Perhaps she saw murder in the evil eyes of the adventuress. She had been told already that Marie Goold was not entitled to the prefix " Lady," and from a trustworthy source she had ascertained that they were a couple of needy adventurers with a very shady and shadowy past.

After that Madame Levin seldom saw her, though she continued to write angry letters asking for the return of her money. Marie Goold ignored these appeals and threats. She was too absorbed in her own immediate difficulties now. Even poor Vere Goold, that helpless incompetent, was feeling the strain. For some days he was actually obliged to keep sober owing to the shortage of ready money.

Every day made matters worse. The Casino was not mentioned, and the Goolds were living in dire poverty, chained to the Villa Menesimy by their penniless condition. Then it was that the wolfish woman

thought out the second great plan which she declared could save them.

She did not condescend to take her husband into her fullest confidence, but she gave him an outline of her latest plans. He agreed, of course. It was too late now for this weak-minded sot to try and emancipate his soul from the thraldom of his domineering wife, and as usual he was content to leave everything to her.

The first move was to get Marie's niece to spend a couple of days away from the apartments in the Villa Menesimy. This was accomplished easily. Then Marie called on Madame Levin with a smile and an apology, and asked her to come to the Villa Menesimy on the following Sunday to have tea with herself and her husband, and receive the forty pounds to which she was entitled.

Madame Levin hesitated. She disliked Vere Goold, the victim of drink and drugs, and she was afraid of Mrs. Goold, who was obviously a person who would stick at nothing. But when Marie emphasized her willingness to settle her debt the widow forgot her fears. She had arranged to leave Monte Carlo within a few days, and she was anxious to recover her forty pounds before she took her departure.

The Sunday came, and at half-past four Madame Levin entered the apartments the Goolds occupied at the Villa Menesimy. She was never seen alive again, for Marie Goold in inviting her to tea did so to take her life. Vere Goold, his faculties paralysed by drugs, opened the door to Madame Levin, and presently Marie emerged from the kitchen to greet her and to explain laughingly that her niece had been called away, and that she was compelled to prepare the tea herself. She placed a chair for her visitor, and returned to the kitchen, whilst Vere Goold, his whole body trembling, sat facing Madame Levin, trying to make conversation.

The widow forgot her doubts and fears, and chatted

brightly to the accompaniment of the pleasant jingle of tea-things from the kitchen. Goold mumbled answers to her remarks, but the widow thought that his nervousness and distracted condition were due to drink and drugs, and she did her best to put him at his ease.

The noise in the kitchen ceased abruptly, but Madame Levin did not turn her head. She talked on of her home in Stockholm and of her future plans, and her voice was the only one heard as Marie Goold crept from the kitchen with a formidable-looking poker in her right hand. Madame Levin's back was towards the kitchen door, and she never heard the footfalls of her murderess.

Vere Goold sprang to his feet as the poker was raised by his wife and brought down with terrific force upon the head of the unfortunate visitor. She collapsed without a sound, and then Marie finished her off with a knife, her husband looking on dazed and stupefied.

She roused him with an oath, and, realizing that they were both in danger, he worked as she commanded. They had a big trunk in the bedroom, and this was hauled out. A large carpet-bag was found which could hold the head and legs of the murdered woman, and the rest of the corpse was packed in the trunk.

Late that night the niece returned, and she noticed at once that the carpet and curtains of the sitting-room were splashed with blood, but her aunt anticipated questions by informing her that her uncle had had a fit, during which he had vomited blood.

The next evening—the murder took place on Sunday, August 4, 1907—the guilty couple prepared for flight. They could not leave the trunk and the carpet-bag behind them, and they took both with them, Goold carrying the latter. The trunk was conveyed in a cab to the railway station, and tickets taken for Marseilles.

They arrived at their destination in the early hours of Tuesday morning, and Goold immediately ordered

the trunk to be labelled "Charing Cross, London," and despatched there. Then with his wife he went to an hotel for rest and refreshment.

It was now the duty of the goods clerk at Marseilles Station to attend to the trunk, but when he came near it he was surprised by a fearful odour. Closer examination proved that blood was oozing from beneath the lid. Pons—that was the clerk's name—went at once to the hotel and saw the Goolds. They explained that the trunk was filled with poultry, hence the blood, but the railway official was not satisfied, and he called at a police station, where the inspector instructed him to inform the Goolds that the trunk would not be allowed to leave Marseilles until it had been opened and the contents examined in their presence.

Pons's first visit to the hotel had aroused doubts in Marie's mind, and she told her husband to get ready to steal out of Marseilles. He quickly obeyed, and they were actually emerging from the hotel when the goods clerk arrived for the second time. He conveyed to them the decision of the police, and Marie, conscious that they were in a tight corner, staked her life on bluff.

"Very well," she said haughtily, "we will take a cab and drive to the station, and when you have opened the trunk you can apologize for having been so impertinent as to doubt my word." The cab was called, and Marie and her husband with the large carpet-bag got in, but the woman's heart must have sunk when Pons entered after them, as though they were under arrest already.

The cab rattled along, and no one spoke until Mrs. Goold clutched the clerk's arm and whispered to him that she would be willing to pay ten thousand francs if he would let them go. Pons sat immovable. He was not to be bribed, and the attempt to do so proved that his suspicions were well-founded.

The examination of the contents of the trunk and

carpet-bag indicated that a brutal murder had been committed, and before the two prisoners had time to confess the police identified the victim, and unravelled the whole story. Marie and her husband were accordingly sent back to Monte Carlo to stand their trial.

The woman was the chief figure in Court, her husband always presenting a shivering, weak-kneed appearance in the dock. Marie Goold was clearly the person who had murdered Madame Levin, and the sentence in her case was death. Her husband was consigned to penal servitude for life.

After a sensational trial they were removed to the French prison at Cayenne, and there in July, 1908, Marie Goold died of typhoid fever. Fourteen months later Vere Goold, driven insane by remorse and the deprivation of drink and drugs, committed suicide.

The fate of the niece was pathetic. She was so upset by her association with the murderers that despite every attention she faded away, dying before she attained her twenty-seventh birthday.

CHAPTER VII

MARTHA KUPFER, SWINDLER

THE European War produced many German criminals, but the most resourceful of them all was Martha Kupfer, a middle-aged widow with a plausible manner and a pretty daughter, whose only capital was a profound knowledge of the weaknesses of her compatriots, out of which she made over £200,000 before she was arrested. She obtained this fortune in less than a couple of years, and there is every reason to believe that had she not grown careless she would never have been detected.

Anybody who is conversant with the German people must be aware that they worship three gods—Food, Money and Decorations. Every Hun before the war would have sold his soul for a medal, and although the ex-Kaiser cheapened the Iron Cross and similar gewgaws by his lavish and ridiculous bestowal of them, they are still prized in Prussia.

When the Allies proclaimed a blockade of Germany, they incidentally turned the thoughts of all true Huns to food, not only because they are the heaviest, grossest and coarsest eaters in Europe, but because the rising prices clearly indicated an easy way to wealth for speculators. Money and food, therefore, were supreme, and decorations were temporarily forgotten.

An elderly Bavarian four years ago, summed up the situation neatly: "There are two things a German cannot escape—Death and the Iron Cross." He got six months in gaol for his humour.

Frau Kupfer, a stoutish little woman with a smiling face and large blue eyes, was one of the many who pondered over the situation. She was poor, and struggling hard to make both ends meet, and she listened with envy and attention to the various stories her neighbours told of the fortunes dealers in food were accumulating. They all wished they had the opportunity to share in their profits, and they spoke wistfully of money invested in banks and insurance companies which were paying miserably small dividends whilst corn dealers and grocers were turning their capital over in less than a month!

As the woman watched the bloated faces grow red and the dull eyes light up with greed, she realized that if only she could persuade them to believe that she had the power to buy and import provisions on wholesale lines and retail them at exorbitant prices to the community they would gladly entrust her with their savings, and she and her daughter would have a good time and never want again.

This was in the early part of 1915, when Martha Kupfer was living in a poverty-stricken flat in Leipzig. She thought the matter over for some days, and at last decided to enter upon a swindling career. She was certain that she had found a royal road to riches, and believing that she would do better in the metropolis she made preparations to live in Berlin.

But she had first to raise at least a hundred pounds to pay her expenses. It would not do to begin without capital, for if she looked poor she would not be able to influence the well-to-do, and she had, therefore, to try her hand in her native town. Frau Kupfer's first exploit was characteristic. She went to the widow of a doctor whom she knew to have a considerable sum in the bank, and she told her a wonderful story of how Wertheim, the great Berlin merchant, had sent for her to act as buyer for his grocery department because she had special facilities for getting the Danish farmers to sell cheaply

to her. She added that she was to have half the profits, and she finally persuaded the old lady to part with five hundred pounds by promising that every month she would receive from her interest amounting to fifty pounds ! This was at the rate of 120 per cent per annum ! The doctor's widow was too good a German to be able to resist the temptation. She handed over the money, and Frau Kupfer and her daughter went to Berlin to start the great campaign.

Thanks to the capital provided by the credulous widow, Frau Kupfer was in a position to rent an expensive flat close to the one-time palatial building known as the British Embassy. Then she did a little shopping, and the outcome of this was that her neighbours—and Germans are renowned for their curiosity— began to babble excitedly about the fashionably-dressed widow and her daughter, who were obviously persons of great wealth.

Frau Kupfer and Gertrude wore the latest gowns, and their hats were wonderful. Every morning a beautifully-appointed motor-car took them for drives, and the two servants—being patriotic, she restricted herself to a couple—exhibited to their friends, when their mistress was out, cards bearing the names of some of the greatest personages in Berlin. Princesses, countesses, generals, admirals, and hosts of the nobility, learned professors, and several millionaire business men and their wives appeared to be on calling terms with the new-comers.

Meanwhile, Frau Kupfer and Gertrude went their own way, seeking no acquaintances, but always charming and good-tempered and charitable.

The fact was that Frau Kupfer knew that to attract people one must appear not to want them. They must come to the gilded parlour of their own accord, but until she was quite ready to swindle them she must pretend not to be anxious to extend her "large circle of acquaintances." It seems unnecessary to add that the cards which so impressed the servants were fakes.

Curiously enough, it was a doctor who started the ball rolling in Berlin. About this time the Berlin newspapers were full of fictitious stories of German victories on land and sea. Twice already it had been reported that Zeppelins had wiped London out of existence, and the daily boast of the papers was that Great Britain had ceased to rule the waves, her ships having been destroyed by the gallant German Navy.

But while the Huns believed anything they wished to believe these flattering reports did not make bread and meat more plentiful, and the food difficulties were increasing instead of diminishing. Only a few persons wondered how it was that London could have been rebuilt between the first and second Zeppelin raids. The majority accepted each lie with delightful simplicity. But only the rich experienced no privations, and Frau Kupfer and pretty Fraulein Gertrude were apparently very well off, for they, at any rate, did not want for the necessaries or the luxuries of life.

One morning, however, Frau Kupfer pretended that she had a headache, and she summoned by telephone a Dr. Richter, a physician who has one of the largest and most fashionable practices in Berlin. Now the doctor, being a near neighbour of the Kupfers, had heard the rumours of their wealth, and he obeyed the summons with alacrity. He found Frau Kupfer charming and amiable, apologizing a dozen times for giving him so much trouble, and murmuring that she was suffering from overwork.

The doctor was sympathetic, and when Gertrude brought him some refreshment he was only too eager to linger over it as his patient chattered. He was curious to discover the secret of her wealth, and as she talked volubly Frau Kupfer "unconsciously" gave him the desired information.

"My agents in Denmark," she said, with a wan smile, "are angry with me because I can't take all the food

they have bought on my account. You see, *Herr Doctor*, I lived for many years in Denmark, and when the war broke out and those terrible English began their blockade it occurred to me that I could help my beloved country by importing food from Denmark, especially as I have unique facilities, owing to the largest farmers being related to me. I didn't mean to make money, but I find that the shops in Berlin are so anxious to buy that they will pay any price. I can turn my capital over ten times a month.

"It seems that there are enormous profits waiting to be picked up, but I haven't the necessary capital. I am quite content, but my agents think I am foolish not to raise another hundred thousand pounds and make as much a month by using it. You have no idea the money that can be coined, but, of course, one must know how to work it." She laid a hand on the doctor's arm and looked at him appealingly. "I have spoken candidly, because I know I can trust you, *Herr Doctor*," she added, in a musical undertone. "You won't tell your friends, will you? I am only a widow, and I don't want to be bothered. I am quite content with the present profits, they will enable me to complete my darling child's education and give her a large dowry when she marries."

The doctor hastened to assure her that her secret was safe with him. Then he took his departure, and it happened that his next patient was Countess von Hohn, the wife of General Count von Hohn, an aide-de-camp to the Kaiser, and a first cousin of Prince von Bülow, the ex-Chancellor. To her the doctor revealed the great secret, knowing that the countess loved money better than life itself. As he anticipated he fired her imagination, and she instantly commanded him to bring about a meeting between herself and the wonderful Frau Kupfer.

"I have twenty thousand pounds lying idle at my banker's," she said, and in her excitement she forgot that she was ill, and began to walk up and down the apart-

ment. "Frau Kupfer, you say, can turn it into forty thousand within three months? I must see her at once. *Herr Doctor*, send your wife to call on her, and after that, when she's at your house, you can ring me up on the telephone, and I will hasten round. If this war goes on against Germany, it behoves us to have something to fall back upon. Everybody knows that dealers in provisions are amassing fortunes. Why shouldn't I have some of the profits too?"

Of course there was no difficulty in effecting an introduction to Frau Kupfer. The two met at Dr. Richter's house at afternoon tea, and Countess von Hohn made herself very charming to the widow, whose dress and jewellery must have cost a small fortune. Indeed, they became so cordial that, although this was their first meeting, the countess willingly accepted an invitation to call at Frau Kupfer's flat the following afternoon.

When she arrived she was shown into the magnificently furnished drawing-room, and there she was purposely left alone for a few minutes. During that time the inquisitive, money-mad woman searched the room for signs of wealth. There were many to be found.

On the mantelpiece was a letter from the manager of the Deutsche Bank acknowledging a deposit of sixty thousand pounds; on a costly desk was a letter from another bank informing Frau Kupfer that their Copenhagen correspondents had advised them to place to her credit one hundred and eleven pounds. Other papers and letters were in the same strain, and when the countess had mastered their contents she was positively trembling with anxiety to get a finger in the financial pie belonging to her newly-made friend.

It was against all etiquette for the countess to be left unattended in the drawing-room, but when Frau Kupfer, clothed in a glorious tea-gown, fluttered in and began to apologize most profusely and extravagantly for her

neglect and rudeness, the countess, who would in any other circumstances have been furious, hastened to reassure her.

"These are war-times, Frau Kupfer," she said, with a smile, "and we can afford to dispense with etiquette. I assure you I have not been sorry for the opportunity to inspect your beautiful furniture and pictures."

Martha Kupfer smiled in acknowledgment, but she knew what her visitor had been doing. One glance had told her that the letters on the table and the mantelpiece had been touched. They were not in the same position that she had left them in. Her little ruse had succeeded, for she had purposely baited the room with these letters and given the countess plenty of time to read them.

Tea was served, and a short time was spent in conversation, in which Gertrude Kupfer discreetly joined, but at the right moment she made an excuse and went out.

The countess was relieved. She had been unable to touch any of the expensive cakes owing to her anxiety to get to business. The moment Gertrude had gone she mentioned the subject uppermost in her mind.

"My dear Frau Kupfer," she said, in her most winning manner, "I want you to promise not to be angry with me if I ask you to let me invest twenty thousand pounds in your little provision enterprise."

Frau Kupfer started and looked embarrassed.

"I feel as if we had known one another for years; you can trust me," she added, appealingly.

But the swindler did not speak, and the countess proceeded:

"I am sure you need capital. Why not let me help?"

Suddenly Frau Kupfer looked up at her.

"You are right, countess," she said, with a charming blush. "It would be selfish of me to deny my friends a share of the profits. I will take your money, and you shall have ten per cent on it every month. I am making that and more.

"Do you know that I can import bacon, for which the people of Berlin pay eight shillings a pound for less than a shilling a pound? The profits on flour are bigger, and I can get a hundred per cent on soap and candles, and practically everything of which the English are trying to deprive us. I have a contract to supply three palaces of the Kaiser's with provisions for a year. You see, I am protected in high quarters. Of course, His Majesty is paying the highest price for the very best, and on that contract alone I shall make thirty shillings profit on every pound I spend. I liked you countess, from the moment we met. You shall have a share. It is a pity you have not more money saved, because that would mean a bigger return. However, you can reinvest your dividends."

Within forty-eight hours the twenty thousand pounds which the Countess von Hohn had received by the sale of her British and French securities was in the hands of Frau Kupfer.

I should mention that six weeks before the war started the German Foreign Minister notified all those who could be trusted to keep the secret that they had better realize their investments in Great Britain, France and Russia. As the countess' husband was one of the inner set, he got the information early, and was able to save his own and his wife's fortune.

This unexpected windfall delighted Frau Kupfer and Gertrude. The first thing they did was to send fifty pounds' "interest" to the doctor's widow at Leipzig, and the second to take a larger and better flat, retaining their original residence, however, and using it mainly as a hiding-place for the choicest provisions.

Frau Kupfer paid her two maids lavishly and fed them luxuriously, and they were hers body and soul in a city where famine threatened to stalk abroad. It was easy, therefore, to stock the flat with preserves, bacon, ham,

wines, cigars, cigarettes and soap, besides a huge amount of clothing.

The stock was replenished from time to time, while now that their headquarters were at one of the finest flats in Berlin, Frau Kupfer and Gertrude were able to proceed from financial triumph to social triumph.

Countess von Hohn was promptly paid her first dividend of two thousand pounds a month after she had invested her money, but she promptly sent the cheque back with a request that it might be added to her capital.

Frau Kupfer must have screamed with laughter when she read this proof of how complete was her power over her first great dupe. She was, indeed, succeeding beyond her wildest dreams.

The widow at Leipzig also helped considerably, for she wrote to a rich and highly placed friend in Berlin about her luck, and that friend promptly called on Frau Kupfer, and begged to be permitted to invest in the great food trust. She found the woman entertaining half a dozen ladies, all of whom bore names that were household words in the country, and when she rather pettishly complained of being bothered she did not resent her manner, but became more supplicating than ever, and eventually went away poorer by a thousand pounds, which she had "invested."

Frau Kupfer was now fairly launched on a career of gigantic swindling. It was no longer necessary to pretend that she had tens of thousands of pounds at her bankers. It was a fact. The money simply poured in upon her every day.

All sorts and conditions of people clamoured to be allowed to join the secret food trust. They quite understood that everything had to be done quietly. The common people, who had no inkling of the tremendous profits that were being made by speculators in food, must be kept in ignorance lest they should complain,

and the horrible Socialist papers make trouble for the profiteers.

Besides, as Frau Kupfer said, they must not forget that they were all partners in a scheme that was daily contravening the Government regulations as to maximum prices.

Thus the times were in her favour. The war dominated everybody's thoughts, and food was so scarce that it ceased to be a question of prices. All were willing to pay provided they obtained the provisions, and so with the necessity for secrecy and the blind, unquestioning obedience and trustfulness of her clients, Frau Kupfer's position seemed impregnable.

Six months after her arrival in Berlin Frau Kupfer launched out as a woman of fashion and means. She went everywhere. The nobility received her, and she was the constant companion of aristocratic dames, who gave her and her daughter seats in their boxes at the theatre.

No one could rival them in the art of dressing. It was the talk of fashionable Berlin that Frau Kupfer and Gertrude paid eighteen shillings a pair for stockings, and never wore them twice, and that they had the most expensive wardrobe in Germany. The swindler maintained the deception by giving dinners, for which the élite scrambled to obtain invitations. The very rarest dishes and vintages were provided for her guests, and despite food restrictions Frau Kupfer could entertain as though there was not a war on and the British blockade a myth.

There might be food riots in Berlin, Leipzig, Hamburg and scores of other places, but the friends of the swindler never wanted for anything, and Frau Kupfer's dinners were her best protection against exposure. She was a charming hostess, and her sympathetic interest in the relatives of her guests who were in the trenches was enchanting.

One of her most profitable deals arose out of her pretended interest in the son of a retired general who was introduced to her by the Countess von Hohn. General von Demidoff, a German of Polish extraction, was known to be a rich man. He had served for fifty years in the army, and had spent at least half that time enriching himself at the expense of the troops under him.

But although he must have had plenty of cash he did not succumb to Frau Kupfer's scheme as quickly as she expected. General von Demidoff—he won the coveted "von" in the Franco-Prussian War—was an old man, and he was reluctant to engage in hazardous speculation, but he was greatly pleased with Frau Kupfer and her daughter.

The arch-swindler never even hinted that he should take shares in the secret food trust, and as he got many luxurious dinners at her expense he was only too glad to number her amongst his acquaintances. They often met at the theatre or at the house of a mutual friend, and it was even rumoured that the old man was keen on the wealthy widow; but this was only an invention. Frau Kupfer had no desire for matrimony. She was aware that marriage would inevitably lead to the discovery of her colossal frauds.

But when Frau Kupfer began to talk about the general's son, and to ask permission to send him parcels of dainties, which she knew he could not obtain for himself, he thought that a woman with such a kind heart must be amongst the best of her sex, and although he took a month to make up his mind he finally decided to entrust ten thousand pounds to her for investment in her business.

When he called on her with this intention he found her reclining gracefully on a sofa reading, in the *Lokalanzeiger*, an account of the victory of the Crown Prince's Army at Verdun. Her eyes were shining with enthu-

siasm, and she was all smiles when General von Demidoff was announced.

For quite ten minutes she would not permit a word of business to pass his lips. He had to have a drink first—she had his favourite beverage ready in a few seconds—and then there was a variety of sandwiches for his delectation. The old soldier was always ready to eat, and he was feeling particularly pleased with himself, when he suddenly told his hostess that he wished to hand her ten thousand pounds for investment.

He made the announcement as though he were conferring a favour on her, and his amazement was all the greater when with a charming smile she coyly refused to accept his offer, explaining that she had all the capital she required, and that the "dear general" had better leave his money where it was.

He went away profoundly puzzled, little realizing that Frau Kupfer was actually gasping for money. She had run through tens of thousands of pounds. Certain wealthy investors had, much to her disappointment, decided not to reinvest their dividends, and had kept her cheques. Tradespeople, hit by the defalcations of other customers, had insisted upon being paid, and as her weekly expenses were never less than two hundred pounds it had not taken her long to get through a fortune.

Yet with admirable fortitude and a wonderful discernment of human nature, she had refused General von Demidoff's offer, although she was in grave financial and personal danger. But she knew her man. She was aware that he would tell the story to all his friends—and the general mixed only in the very best society—and, better than that, she was willing to stake her life, as she had done her liberty, that within a few days he would be back again with twenty thousand pounds at least, which he would literally thrust into her hands, and insist upon her keeping.

I have given this story in detail because it is typical of the methods of Germany's greatest war swindler. It is taken from the account of the preliminary examination before the judge in Berlin, who at first would scarcely be brought to believe that the general had actually returned to Frau Kupfer's flat, and had compelled her to accept twenty-five thousand pounds for investment in her food trust.

The money came as a godsend, and once more the precious pair of swindlers were rejoicing. Of course, the mother was the brains of the movement. Gertrude Kupfer had nothing to do except to look pretty and wear the most costly clothes.

There were very few young men worth attracting to the flat for her mother to rob, though now and then she was able to relieve monetary pressure by bringing along a wounded officer of family and position who could be tempted to invest a few hundred pounds. Frau Kupfer, however, thought only in thousands, even if she was willing to take any money, however small in amount.

For over eighteen months the merry game continued. The great war increased in intenseness, and the world was topsy-turvy, but Frau Kupfer and Gertrude indulged in every extravagant pleasure, and swindled high and low alike. Some one had to pay for those champagne dinners, and for the clothes they wore. Gertrude Kupfer alone averaged fifty pounds a week on her wardrobe.

Frau Kupfer gave many lavish entertainments to wounded soldiers. Once she took the whole seating capacity of a theatre and filled the building with soldiers, and while mother and daughter were at the zenith of success they must have given tea-parties to thousands of warriors.

The money dribbled through their fingers like water, and fresh dupes had to be found almost daily to pay

the interest due to the original investors. The smallest interest promised had been one hundred per cent per annum, and for many months the widow managed to remit the amount owing. It was a wonderful feat considering the circumstances, but she stopped at nothing, and she even swindled the maidservants out of their savings.

One of her brightest ideas was to patronize the small tradespeople, and thus bring them under her influence. In due course they succumbed, and sums from ten to two hundred pounds were obtained from them.

Nothing worried Germany's "Madame Humbert." Berlin was thronged with wounded; the papers were beginning to give hints of defeats; and it was admitted that a complete victory for the Fatherland was out of the question—but Frau Kupfer was unperturbed. She was merry and light-hearted, and she lived so well that her naturally plump face and stout figure expanded, and she was a living testimony to the ineffectiveness of the British blockade. Her circle of friends continued to grow. Her dinner-parties were all the more appreciated. She was one of the most sought after persons in Berlin society, and in the hour of her triumph she never thought of the dark, underground dungeons that are so numerous in Germany. It seemed as though she could never know defeat, no matter what happened to her country.

Christmas Day, 1916, found Berlin a city of gloom, save for the gorgeous flat where Frau Kupfer was entertaining a score of high-born society dames and a few elderly men to a sumptuous repast. It proved to be the last of a long series, for she was taken ill after the dinner, and for the next three weeks was too ill to leave her room, and in those three weeks the Berlin police discovered all about the great swindle. An accident led to the catastrophe.

I have mentioned that Frau Kupfer had two flats,

and that she used the smaller one as a storing place for provisions for her own use. One evening a vigilant-eyed policeman, who was feeling hungry, noticed that several large parcels were being delivered at a certain flat near the Wilhelmstrasse. He had been warned to keep a look-out for food hoarders, and he came to the conclusion that this was an attempt to evade the regulations. He therefore forced his way past the carters into the flat, and, having ordered the terrified maid to clear out, examined the place for himself. It did not take him long to discover enough provisions to stock a grocer's shop. There were scores of hams, thousands of preserves neatly stacked against the walls, boxes of cigars, cigarettes, cases of wine, and plenty of flour, sugar, sweets, etc. I fancy the policeman indulged in a good meal before he reported to Police President von Jagow what he had found.

That night Frau Kupfer and her daughter were arrested on a charge of contravening the food regulations, and with their arrest the bubble burst. The "investors," first uneasy, grew alarmed, and began to talk. A few days later they all knew that they had been swindled.

Inside two years Frau Kupfer had robbed them of two hundred thousand pounds, all of which she had managed to dissipate, leaving nothing for them. The Food Trust had had no existence save in her imagination. Mother and daughter are now in damp cells in the Moabit Prison, and when Frau Kupfer leaves that ghastly prison house she will be in her coffin, for in Germany swindling is considered ten times a greater offence than murder, however brutal that murder may have been, and the greatest of Hun food swindlers will spend the remainder of her life in prison.

Gertrude Kupfer, however, will be released in a few years because it has been held that she acted entirely under the influence of her mother, and was in no way an originator of the swindle.

CHAPTER VIII

MADAME GUERIN, MATRIMONIAL AGENT

THERE have been many matrimonial agency swindlers, but when Madame Guerin, the plump little Frenchwoman with the pleasant and engaging manner, entered that "profession" she introduced new methods into that old form of fraud. She did not hanker after a lot of clients, preferring to find a nice, gullible man with money, scientifically relieve him of it, and then pass on to the next. Her career proved short and exciting, and only by an accident did it fail to wind up with a tragedy. But that was not her fault, for she showed that to obtain a fortune she was capable of running any risk.

It was at Versailles, in the shadow of the old palace, that Madame Guerin, with the assistance of a friend, who was known as Cesbron, but who was really her husband, started her matrimonial agency.

It was no ordinary affair worked from a cheap suite of offices with all the usual appliances of a modern business. Madame Guerin could not be as sordid as that. She was human and sympathetic, and her personality was electric. She had reached that time of life when men found her society agreeable, because a flirtation could not be taken seriously by her. She let them understand that she knew that most men wanted young and pretty wives with fortunes, and that she was in a position to help them to find their ideal.

Her "business premises" took the shape of a pleasant, secluded Villa, beautifully furnished and delightfully

managed. It was an honour to be invited to an intimate little dinner at her home, and her invitations were very seldom declined. When it was tactfully whispered that the fair tenant was in the habit of bringing very eligible girls and handsome bachelors together, she quickly found the sort of clients she required.

One of her first victims was a man of good family, who held a remunerative Government post. He was just the type of man who would rather die than enter into negotiations with the average matrimonial agent, but over a recherché meal at the Villa there seemed to be no loss of dignity in half-carelessly discussing his desire to marry a girl of beauty and fortune.

It was then that Madame Guerin revealed talents of a high order as a swindler. She never lost her pose of the smart society woman who was entertaining a friend and talking about his future amid the soft lights and the restful furniture.

When the Government official mentioned that he had about three hundred a year in addition to his salary of about the same amount, Madame Guerin decided that there must be a way of separating him from some of his fortune by persuading him that she was going to add to it.

" I know a very pretty girl," she said languidly, " a dear girl, too, and one who is anxious to marry. She is an orphan, and is bothered by fortune-hunters. She would like to become a gentleman's wife, and as she has five thousand a year derived from first-class securities, it seems to me, my friend, that she would just about suit you."

Five thousand a year! It made his mouth water. " Where can I meet this delightful lady ? " he asked anxiously.

" As she is my dearest friend I could invite her here," she answered, after a moment's pause. " Her name is Miss Northcliffe."

"She is English then?" said the official, but there was no disapproval in his tone.

"Her mother was French," said Madame Guerin, who had all the time been watching his face. "Her father was an eminent doctor in London. Miss Northcliffe loves France, and she has often told me she would love to be married to a Frenchman and live all her life in Paris."

The bait took, for the fish rose to it greedily. Thereupon Madame Guerin, feeling she had "landed" him, dropped her pose as hostess and became a matrimonial agent. Of course her expenses would be heavy in connection with the visit of Miss Northcliffe. She would have to furnish a suite of rooms specially for the great English heiress. Then, as he would gain five thousand pounds a year by the introduction, it would not be out of place if he paid something in advance. Madame Guerin guaranteed success, and so forth. He believed every word.

"You and my dear girl friend will be thrown together for days," she said, in a confidential tone. "I'll invite no one else here, and it'll be your own fault if you don't win her. But you must send me one of your photographs to-night, and I will show it to her the moment she arrives. She is a very impressionable, impulsive girl, and I am certain she will fall in love with your picture."

Most men will believe a woman's flattery, and in the case of this French official he swallowed Madame Guerin's with avidity. It seemed to him he was on the road to riches, and he scarcely hesitated to send not only the photograph but a preliminary fee of a hundred pounds.

If he was disturbed by doubts during the succeeding days, they were set at rest when an invitation arrived to meet Miss Northcliffe at dinner at the cosy Villa. He was, as he admitted afterwards, almost crazy with

delight. The heiress was a reality. Madame Guerin had not been "pulling his leg" after all. Had she asked him for a thousand pounds there and then he would probably have paid it without a murmur.

The dinner was a brilliant success from start to finish. Never before had he met such a charming, unaffected girl. A typical English beauty with fair hair, a peach-like skin and dark grey eyes, who dressed exquisitely, and spoke French with a fascinating accent. Her reserve, too, was perfectly enchanting. She did not gush or chatter, and during the greater part of the dinner she hardly uttered a word, but towards the end she became animated.

"She said she would wait until she had made up her mind about you before becoming friendly," whispered Madame Guerin at the first opportunity.

He thrilled with pleasure and turned to resume his conversation with Miss Northcliffe; and when he left the Villa close on midnight his brain was in a whirl.

Miss Northcliffe had plainly shown her preference for him, and he was in love with her. He was an expert on old engravings and modern poetry, and she had, wonderful to relate, revealed a knowledge of those two subjects which, though not profound, proved that she would be an ideal collaborator when they were married.

And then her dress! It was a dream, an exquisite creation that might have been made out of angels' wings. The pearl necklace the English heiress had worn was worth twenty thousand pounds. At least, Madame Guerin said so, and she ought to know, because she had some famous pearls herself. He lay awake most of the night exulting over his good fortune, and early the following morning rushed off to Versailles to take Miss Northcliffe for a motor drive.

A week later Madame Guerin suggested that he should propose, but she warned him that the girl was suspicious of fortune-hunters and that he must prove

to her that he was not a needy vagabond marrying to be kept.

He laughed at the notion, but he took it seriously all the same, and when Miss Northcliffe modestly and blushingly accepted his offer of marriage he impulsively asked to be tested as to his means.

But Miss Northcliffe preferred to leave that to her dear friend and guardian, Madame Guerin, and the latter thereupon suggested that he should realize a couple of thousand pounds and settle it right away on Miss Northcliffe, who was, of course, equally willing to supply evidence that her fortune was not a myth.

The infatuated man declined to doubt his fiancée for a moment, and the two thousand pounds were in the possession of Madame Guerin two days later. She received the money with a congratulatory smile, and told him to call again the following Sunday and fix the date for the wedding.

There were four days to Sunday, and how he passed them he never knew. Certainly he was a very inefficient public servant during that time, for his mind was concentrated on the beauty and fortune of the lovely English girl who was about to become his wife. When Sunday came round he was up at dawn, and two hours before he was due to start for Versailles he was hatted and gloved.

The Villa looked very inviting as he walked up to it and pulled the old-fashioned bell. A long pause ensued, and then the fat cook opened the door and breathlessly informed him that Madame was resting in her room but would be down in a few minutes. He expressed his regrets, but when he was in the drawing-room he began to feel that there was something wrong. The atmosphere depressed him, and he had to reprove himself audibly for being morbid to prevent a fit of pessimism overwhelming him.

He was staring through the window when Madame

Guerin entered, very pale and dabbing at her eyes with a handkerchief. In great alarm he rushed to her side. What had happened ? Where was Miss Northcliffe ? Was she ill ? A dozen questions tumbled over one another, and all the time the plump little widow tried to control her sobs.

"Oh, monsieur," she exclaimed, with a piteous expression, "how shall I break the news ? I am distracted, desolate ! Miss Northcliffe—she has gone—disappeared. I know not where. She may be kidnapped or she may have run away. I am too distracted to be able to think. It is all dreadful and—" A flood of tears completed the sentence.

In vain he implored her to tell him plainly what had happened. The result was that he left the Villa aware that he had lost his two thousand pounds and dimly suspicious of Madame Guerin, although she had sworn that Miss Northcliffe had taken away every penny of it, and, indeed, owed a goodly sum to her.

Further reflection convinced him that he had been swindled, and he began to think of appealing to the police, but at forty-five one does not do things in a hurry, and he was not the person to court ridicule. He had walked into the trap open-eyed, and if his colleagues in the Government service heard the story of the "English heiress" they would make his life a misery with their vulgar chaff. So beyond another visit to the Versailles Villa to inquire if Miss Northcliffe had returned he took no steps to recover his losses.

The next exploit was even more subtle. Some one introduced a well-to-do Parisian of the name of Lalère to Madame Guerin along with the information that he was on the look-out for a wealthy wife. As Monsieur Lalère had a comfortable bank balance of his own she enthusiastically agreed to provide him with a bride, and when she learnt that he was partial to an English girl her delight was boundless.

On this occasion the Versailles Villa was not utilized as the stage for the little comedy. She decided to vary her methods, and she started by going to London and putting up at a fashionable hotel. The two thousand pounds extracted from the Government official came in very handy, as even in London one can live quite a long time in an expensive hotel on that amount.

Shortly after her arrival Lalère came at her invitation. Madame Guerin was, of course, fashionably dressed and apparently busy all day calling upon the leading members of the English aristocracy. She could not give him more than a few minutes one afternoon, and when he expressed disappointment she promised to do her best when she had fulfilled her social obligations. She mentioned glibly that she was dining that night with Mrs. Asquith, whose husband was then Chancellor of the Exchequer, and that the day after she was lunching with " the Crewes."

The Frenchman was greatly impressed by these lies, and he therefore appreciated all the more her spontaneous invitation to him to accompany her to the opera the following Monday evening. It seemed that a friend of hers had been called out of town and that her stall was vacant. Madame Guerin added that she hoped to be able to introduce Lalère to some English heiresses between the acts.

Monday night found Madame Guerin and Monsieur Lalère seated in the stalls at the Covent Garden Theatre. Just before the curtain went up the woman indicated a private box wherein three young ladies, beautifully dressed, were sitting.

" Three friends of mine and all rich, monsieur," she said confidentially. " You can have your choice. Let me know the one you prefer. They will be guided entirely by my advice."

Of course after that Lalère had no eyes for the stage, and some of the greatest singers in the world failed

to engage his attention. His eyes were always wandering to the box where the three English beauties were, and he studied their appearances carefully. Eventually his choice alighted upon the girl in the centre, whose name was, Madame Guerin informed him, Miss Northcliffe.

Thus once more the mysterious Miss Northcliffe appeared on the scene, and again she found a Frenchman who was mesmerized by her beauty and her reputed fortune. All the acting that night at Covent Garden was not behind the footlights. Both Madame Guerin and Miss Northcliffe could have given points to many of the professionals.

That the girl who acted as the matrimonial agent's decoy was clever and educated there can be no doubt. She could speak French fluently, and she had a first-rate knowledge of the world. She had been able to talk intelligently to the authority on old engravings and modern poetry, and now she charmed Lalère by her acquaintance with the subjects that interested him.

The sequel was that Lalère paid Madame Guerin fifteen hundred pounds on the understanding that she was to bring about a match between himself and Miss Northcliffe. But no sooner had he parted with the money than the " heiress " vanished, greatly to Madame Guerin's distress and Lalère's annoyance; and all he had to show for his expenditure was a cynical and bitter contempt for women-folk in general.

Success made Madame Guerin avaricious. She began to crave for a large fortune, and she believed that she was clever enough to gain it at one stroke. Experience had proved that it was easy enough to open a man's purse with a story of a rich bride, and her victims took their disappointment so calmly that there was no danger of retribution. Perhaps the sight of wealthy London fired her imagination. Anyhow, she immediately began to look round for a suitable dupe there.

It was, however, necessary to have her husband's help. As she pretended to be a widow, she called him her friend, and it was as Monsieur Cesbron that she introduced him to her friends and acquaintances. Hitherto Cesbron had wisely kept in the background, an admiring spectator from afar of his wife's astuteness, and no doubt he shared in the little windfalls from the Government official and Lalère.

He was not averse to taking a leading part in the next big swindle, and it was Cesbron who found the very man for their purpose. Through a friend he had heard that in the West End of London there was a doctor who had saved a considerable sum of money, and who was in every way a very eligible bachelor.

The initial difficulty was how to make themselves known to him, but Madame Guerin solved the problem by planning a pretty little scheme. She might have called on the doctor in the guise of a patient, but she decided not to do this lest he discovered there was nothing the matter with her.

Her final plan was to pretend that she had invented a new method of sterilizing milk, and that she wished to have a doctor's opinion of its merits.

Madame Guerin underrated her abilities, for, as events proved, she need not have bothered about the "invention." The doctor was pleased to make the acquaintance of the charming widow, and she soon had every opportunity for dragging in references to her rich young lady friends who were anxious to find husbands.

The medical man was incredulous at first, then curious, and eventually impressed. Madame Guerin did not look like a swindler or talk in the manner of a professional matrimonial agent. She was too human for that, and there was nothing of the hard-headed business woman about her.

The doctor readily agreed to join her at a dinner-

party and meet the young heiresses, and choose which of them he would care to marry.

The meeting took place at an hotel, and on this occasion Miss Northcliffe failed to win his approval. A young lady whose name was given as Miss Smith gained his vote.

Miss Smith was a beauty, vivacious, clever, and fascinating. When he was persuaded to believe that she had a large fortune, the doctor considered himself the luckiest man in the world.

The girl, one of Madame Guerin's cutest confederates, was equally as good an actress as Miss Northcliffe, and, shrewd man of the world as the doctor was, she had no difficulty in persuading him that he had captured her maiden fancy.

Now, as I have said, the doctor was not a penniless adventurer. He was a prosperous professional man, with a good position and a consoling balance at his bankers, the *Crédit Lyonnais*. Apart from the somewhat unconventional means by which they had become acquainted, the engagement was, on the surface, nothing remarkable. Miss Smith was obviously well educated, and fit to preside over the doctor's home. They were, therefore, of equal social position.

Madame Guerin was, of course, the brains of the affair, and only the "spade work" was left to her husband. It was she who decided when she and Miss Smith should leave London on the plea that they had to keep engagements in France, and it was she who instructed Miss Smith to agree to her fiancé's request that she should name the day.

The two women left for Paris the day before Cesbron, but they only stopped a day at the capital before they proceeded to the Villa the swindler had rented in the vicinity of Fontainebleau. It was situated in a very lonely spot, and Madame Guerin and Cesbron had taken it because they had decided to murder the doctor and obtain his fortune.

They had already endeavoured to get the doctor to transfer his account to the Paris bank which they said looked after Miss Smith's immense fortune; but he declined to effect the change. However, they were not disheartened. If they were equal to killing the doctor they were also capable of forging a claim to his money at the *Crédit Lyonnais*.

The marriage was fixed to take place in the second week in November, 1906, and early in the same month Madame Guerin invited the doctor to spend a few days at her Villa before he became the husband of the heiress. He was very busy just then, but, of course, he was most anxious to see his friends, and he accepted the invitation, and in due course arrived at the isolated house.

If he had not been absorbed in his forthcoming marriage, the doctor would hardly have found the place attractive at that time of the year. Of course, Madame Guerin was always interesting, and she was a perfect hostess. There were good points about her friend Cesbron, too, and, with the excitement of the engagement, the flattery of his hostess, and the attentions of Cesbron, the doctor was never dull.

He could never be expected to believe that the woman with the plump, smiling face and the sympathetic eyes had planned his murder, or that Cesbron, her husband, was merely waiting for the proper moment to "remove" him.

One afternoon Madame Guerin and the doctor were chatting in the front room, when Cesbron drove up in a cart with a huge, iron-bound trunk.

"Is our friend going to be married too?" he asked jocularly.

Madame Guerin's eyes glinted, but her lips parted in a smile.

"Oh, he is always buying clothes," she said indifferently, "and he likes to keep them clean and dry when travelling. He told me yesterday he had ordered a new trunk. It is a hobby of his.

The truth was that that trunk had been purchased to hold the doctor's corpse!

There was quite a little party at the Villa that night, and all the time the huge box was waiting in the next room for its victim. The visitor had no suspicion that anything was wrong. He knew by now that Madame Guerin would expect a commission for having introduced him to the great heiress, but he thought none the less of her for that. Cesbron, too, was respectful and attentive, and all appeared to be looking forward with intense satisfaction to the marriage celebration. Miss Smith was not, of course, at the Villa. She was now in Paris selecting her trousseau, and her fiancé had to be content with a charming little love-letter which came to him every morning.

The day before the one fixed for the tragedy Cesbron and the doctor happened to be in the little garden, when the former playfully started a discussion as to their respective physical conditions, and before long the two men had agreed to a friendly wrestling match to see which of them was the stronger.

To Cesbron's surprise and annoyance, he discovered that the doctor was by far the better of the two. This put him out, for it meant that he would have to resort to fire-arms to achieve his object—the murder of the guest.

Cesbron did not like using a revolver. It made a lot of noise, and, lonely as the Villa was, there was always the danger that some one might be passing at the moment of the crime. However, the risk had to be taken. He knew now for certain that he was quite incapable of seizing the doctor by the throat and strangling him, and that if it came to a fight he would be no match for his opponent.

On November 9, 1906, the doctor was alone writing a letter in the drawing-room. The house was very quiet, and he was under the impression that Madame

Guerin and Cesbron had gone out. At this time of the year it was dark at half-past four, and the doctor wrote leisurely, pausing occasionally to improve a phrase before committing it to writing.

Suddenly an explosion seemed to take place in the room, and simultaneously he felt something sting him. The next moment he knew that a bullet had passed into his neck behind his left ear, cutting through the tongue and soft palate, and breaking several teeth.

But the wound was not sufficient to prevent his rising and confronting Cesbron, who was standing near the door with a smoking revolver in his hand. Only for a fraction of a second did the two men pause. Then the injured man made a dash at Cesbron, who, recalling his playful encounter of the day before, took to flight, well aware that he would be helpless if the doctor got his fingers round his throat.

When Cesbron sped into the darkness the doctor made his way out of the house and into the garden, stumbling towards the gate. To his surprise this was locked. Evidently the conspirators had not forgotten anything.

There was nothing for him to do now but to try and climb over the wall, and he succeeded in getting his head above the top, but immediately it was silhouetted against the sky another shot was fired, and for the second time he was hit. He fell back into the garden, where, thanks to the darkness and the shelter of the bushes, he was able to remain concealed until the morning, when he crawled to the police station at Fontainebleau, and told the story of the attack on him at the Villa.

The police took the doctor to the local hospital, and then went in search of Madame Guerin who, when arrested, thought to avenge herself by swearing that the doctor was her accomplice. She lied so skilfully that she persuaded the police to detain him for a time,

but in the long run the truth was discovered, and it was proved that the doctor was merely another of her dupes.

A strange feature of the case was the disappearance of Cesbron. The police and detective force of France searched for him everywhere, but he was never seen, and the same lack of success was experienced when the authorities became anxious to make the acquaintance of the English heiresses, Miss Smith and Miss Northcliffe. Not a trace of them could be found, and this was very fortunate for Madame Guerin, because, when she was brought up for trial in July, 1907, she could pose as a poor woman who was being prosecuted whilst her partners were allowed to go free owing to the incompetence of the authorities.

The jury took a lenient view of her swindles, ignoring the charge of attempted murder, because it was undoubtedly Cesbron who had fired the two shots at the doctor, and without his presence in the dock it was impossible to tell exactly what part the female prisoner took in the final tragedy. But that she was a very dangerous adventuress and swindler was obvious, and everybody was surprised when the judge passed sentence of three years' imprisonment only.

Her face lit up with joy. She had been afraid that it would have been at least ten years. Three years! Why, it was worth running such a bogus matrimonial agency if that was the only punishment.

It is the French custom to sentence any accused person who fails to answer the charge in person, and Cesbron was ordered two years' hard labour. He did not, however, oblige the prosecution by appearing and undergoing his punishment, and from that day to this nothing has been seen or heard of him.

CHAPTER IX

THE MURDER OF MADAME HOUET

THE annals of French crime are rich in dramatic and extraordinary episodes, but none can excel in breathless interest the story of the murder of Madame Houet and the discovery and punishment of her murderers twelve years after her tragic death.

Madame Houet was a widow with a fortune estimated to exceed two hundred and fifty thousand francs, who lived with her son in a little house in the Rue St. Jacques, Paris. Her only daughter was married to a wine merchant named Robert, who was reputed to be well off. The old lady's son was a big, powerful fellow, whose weak brain prevented him earning more than a precarious livelihood, a fact which annoyed his penurious parent. She scraped and saved and half-starved herself to be able to add a few coins daily to her store. In the circumstances, it is not astonishing that amongst her neighbours she should have had the reputation of being worth a great deal more than she actually was.

The gossips never tired of discussing her hidden wealth, and everybody was prepared to hear of her murder for the sake of her hoard. Even her son-in-law was ignorant of the extent of her savings—the old lady would never discuss the subject with him or anyone else—and, after making allowances for the exaggerations of the neighbours, he came to the conclusion that his wife's share of her inheritance would not be less

than a quarter of a million francs. There were times, too, when he comforted himself with the assurance that his wife's brother would not live very long. More than one doctor had hinted that the weak brain would soon affect the body, and that he would suddenly collapse and die.

These thoughts induced the wine merchant to sell his business and retire. Robert had always wanted to live the life of a gentleman, as he termed it. He was fond of the theatre and the restaurants, and he had a mania for tempting fortune on the racecourse and on the roulette table. So when he observed signs of decline in his mother-in-law—and his wife often wept as she told him that the old lady was fading away—he found a purchaser for his shop, pocketed the proceeds, and went the pace, confident that before he had spent his capital he would be in possession of Madame Houet's cash.

But Madame Houet was tougher than he thought, and easily outlasted the twenty-five thousand francs Robert had received for his shop. For a few months Monsieur and Madame Robert were seen everywhere, and they became familiar figures in the fashionable restaurants and theatres. When he came to his last thousand-franc note Robert determined to risk it all on a visit to a gambling den. He carried out his intention, and returned home at three in the morning penniless.

He was now not only without resources, but heavily in debt. As the husband of Madame Houet's heiress he had been given extended credit, but the ex-wine merchant knew that if he failed to keep his agreements his creditors would complain to his mother-in-law.

But could he hold his creditors back until the old lady died ? Several times a week he called on her and noticed with increasing alarm that she was daily improving in health. Her appetite was prodigious, as

he discovered every time he took her out to lunch. Driven desperate, the penniless man tried forgery, and by imitating his mother-in-law's signature on the back of a bill induced the merchant who had purchased his business to advance him twelve thousand five hundred francs for three months.

The weeks passed all too swiftly, and when only a fortnight remained of the three months the forger's position was worse than ever. Fourteen days more and the forged bill would be presented and dishonoured, and Madame Houet would repudiate the signature. Robert went for long walks every night to think over the situation, and eventually he found a solution.

" I have urgent business to attend to," he told his wife one morning, " and I am afraid I shall have to be often away from your side. Why not pay that long-promised visit to your aunt in Marseilles ? I should be happier if I knew you were with her."

His wife agreed, and for a month was out of Paris, and during that month the tragedy occurred.

Robert had decided to murder his mother-in-law so that his wife might receive at once her share of the estate. He knew that the old lady had recently made her will bequeathing her fortune in equal shares to her son and her daughter, and, therefore, there was no danger of Julia losing her inheritance. The ex-wine merchant, however, was not capable of carrying out the plan unaided, and he sought an acquaintance, Bastien, a jobbing carpenter, who promised to help in the murder for a fee of twenty thousand francs, to be paid within thirty days of Madame Robert's receipt of her legacy. The terms were agreed to, and they began to make their plans.

There was a big garden attached to a house in the Rue Vaugirard, and Robert rented both for a month, and the night before the murder he and Bastien dug a grave for their intended victim, who at the time they

were working was busy counting her savings with a view to sending the money to the bank in the morning. The widow may have been a miser, but she had a great deal of common sense, and she never kept large sums in her home.

Curiously enough, she and her son had of late begun to quarrel fiercely. She had accused him of being lazy, and he had flung reproaches at her, and it was known in the Rue St. Jacques that the Houets were constantly at loggerheads.

"There'll be a tragedy in that house," said the landlord of the inn at the corner. "The police ought to be told. It is not safe to leave the old woman alone with that crazy son of hers."

When the ill-feeling between the mother and son was at its height, Bastien, Robert's confederate, drove up to her residence in a cab, and on being admitted to her presence announced that he came with an invitation to spend the day with her son-in-law. Madame eagerly accepted, for the three meals at his expense would enable her to add at least a franc to her store.

On the journey to the Rue Vaugirard the widow commented on the fact that her strange companion held a coil of rope in his hands.

"Yes," he said, with an impudent grin, "I bought it for a special job. I hope it will prove strong enough."

Again he grinned meaningly; but the old woman was, of course, unconscious of the fact that the "special job" he referred to was her murder by strangulation.

The cab stopped outside the gate at the end of the garden and some distance from the house. With remarbakle agility Madame Houet descended, and when Bastien had opened the entrance to the garden passed in. She had not proceeded a dozen paces, however, nor had she had time to notice the newly-made grave, when two strong hands shot out and gripped her by

the throat, and before she could utter a sound Bastien's rope was around her neck, and she was swiftly strangled. The next ten minutes was spent by the men filling in the grave, and when that task was over they adjourned to the house and steadied their nerves by imbibing copious draughts of wine.

"The fortune is mine!" Robert cried exultingly. "Bastien, my friend, we have nothing to fear. You have only to keep your mouth shut, and the police are helpless, and ten years hence, even if they discover proofs of our guilt, they won't be able to touch us. That is the law of France. A murderer must be convicted within ten years of the last arrest for the crime or else he goes free without any penalty."

"And the money?" asked Bastien sharply.

"I have been told that it takes about a month to wind up the affairs of a dead woman," said the ex-wine merchant. "My wife will have her mother's fortune by then. Call four weeks from to-day and I will hand you your well-earned reward."

They shook hands on it and parted. Nothing remained except to wait, and that was easy enough.

The instant Madame Houet was missed her son was arrested. On the face of it there seemed to be every justification for that procedure, and the detectives felt that they had the murderer in their power. That the widow had been murdered they had no doubt, and it was only when they were searching for her body that they arrested Robert and Bastien. Following the capture of the latter the son was released, it being admitted that he could have had nothing to do with the disappearance of his mother. It was, however, quite another matter to find the corpse. Madame Houet had simply vanished, and, although the detectives built up a strong case against the two accused, they were compelled to release them because they were unable to produce the body.

It was proved that Bastien had called for the widow and had driven away with her, and it was known that he had fetched her at the instigation of Robert. The two men agreed that they had seen Madame Houet on the day of her disappearance, but swore that she had left them with the intention of going home. The cleverest members of the detective force traced the men's movements on the fatal day, but failed to discover the garden in the Rue Vaugirard, for Robert had, of course, never gone near it since the hasty burial, and, apparently, there was no one to give information to the police about the strange man who had paid the rent for it for a month and had not occupied it for more than a day and that day September 13th, 1821.

When Robert and his confederate walked out of their cells they entered a café and had lunch, and they confined their conversation to denunciations of the authorities for having kept them in gaol so long. Before they separated, however, Robert fixed an appointment with his fellow-assassin to call for the twenty thousand francs and they went their way, animated by feelings of triumph, the ex-wine merchant, especially, scarcely able to suppress his joy.

There is a well-known proverb which says that "A little learning is a dangerous thing," and Robert, the murderer, discovered its truth when he sent his wife to claim half her mother's fortune. He had carefully studied the laws relating to murder, and, confident that the police would never find Madame Houet's body, he had willingly accepted the inconveniences of being constantly under suspicion because he believed that the ten years required by the law would soon pass and place him beyond danger. After the tenth year if the corpse and his guilt were brought to light he would not be prosecuted. It was a curious regulation, but it just suited Robert, and he hummed gaily to himself while awaiting his wife's return.

She came back with a long face and whispered the bad news.

"The gentlemen in the Government office told me," she said, between her tears of disappointment, "that under the law they cannot distribute my mother's money until ten years have passed, when, if her body isn't found, she becomes legally dead. At present, according to the law, she is considered to be alive, and, therefore, her estate cannot be touched."

The ex-wine merchant nearly collapsed, and it was some time before he induced his wife to complain that she was practically destitute and extract an allowance of thirty francs a week on account from the State. For that she had to sign a bond guaranteeing to repay the money to her mother if the latter should appear on the scene again.

By dint of desperate appeals to relatives Robert succeeded in getting the money to take up the forged bill, but he had now another danger to face—Bastien, the jobbing carpenter, who, he knew, would make a terrible row when told of the failure to get hold of the widow's money.

The carpenter came with an expectant expression, and left infuriated. Vainly had Robert explained. Bastien bluntly informed him that he did not believe a word.

"You are trying to defraud me!" he had shrieked, shaking his fist and sending Madame Robert into hysterics. "I will be even with you yet, and if to-morrow you have not the money ready, I—" He ceased abruptly and shuffled out of the house.

He did not come back for a fortnight. Then ensued a repetition of the first scene, terminated by Robert handing him two hundred and fifty francs.

It was a couple of months before Bastien believed his explanation of his poverty, but the two murderers continued to quarrel whenever they met. Robert was

again hopelessly in debt, and could hardly raise a few francs to give to his fellow-assassin, who was blackmailing him daily. Eventually things became so bad that Bastien in desperation committed a burglary for which he was arrested and sent to penal servitude for seven years.

Then fresh information reached the authorities and Robert was arrested again, whilst Bastien was brought from prison and taken with the ex-wine merchant before the magistrate. They were severely examined, but despite many contradictions and lies they had to be discharged again, Bastien returning to gaol, and Robert to the miserable rooms he called his home. This second arrest, however, meant that still ten years would have to elapse before Madame Houet was considered dead in law and her assassins free from punishment.

When Bastien had served his sentence for burglary he began to blackmail Robert systematically, until another robbery landed him in gaol again. As the years went by he grew jealous of the liberty enjoyed by Robert, and, becoming garrulous, eventually confided in an old convict with whom he worked exactly nine years and eight months from the day of his second arrest. His fellow-prisoner had twelve years to serve, and was, accordingly, not to be feared, but the very week he heard Bastien's story of the tragedy in the Rue Vaugirard he saved a warder's life by an act of bravery, and was rewarded by a free pardon in March, 1833.

The pardon, however, did not include employment, and the ex-convict found the world hard and unsympathetic. No one would have anything to do with a man whose record included a murder and several violent assaults, and he was starving when it occurred to him that he might be able to make something out of Bastien's confession. He, thereupon, called on the chief of police, and offered to tell him where the body of the

widow was provided he was given five hundred francs when his statement had been tested.

The chief willingly promised the sum mentioned, for it was a continual source of exasperation to him that two such villains as Robert and Bastien should have outwitted him and his legion of trained detectives.

The ex-convict recounted what Bastien had told him, and for the third time Robert and Bastien were charged together. They were not so confident now, for something seemed to tell them that they were not going to escape again.

It is the French custom to have the accused present at any important discovery bearing upon their case, and Robert and Bastien were, accordingly, handcuffed and taken to the garden at the back of the house in the Rue Vaugirard. Half a dozen detectives were provided with spades, and, whilst the prisoners looked on, they dug as if for their lives. But they met with no reward, and Robert, who had remained motionless throughout, was regarding them with a sneering smile when one of the detectives suddenly turned on him.

"Get out of the way, man!" he cried contemptuously. "One would think that the widow Houet had gripped you by the feet."

On hearing this Robert started as though he had been shot, and it did not surprise the officials in the least when the skeleton of the murdered woman was found exactly under the spot where he had been standing. It was plain that he had hoped to keep the officers away from it and that his ruse would cause them to leave the garden without the corpse. Had they done so, he and Bastien would have had to be released.

The skeleton was in an almost perfect state of preservation and there was not the slightest difficulty in identifying it, for the rope was still around the neck and on one of the fingers of the left hand was a gold ring.

The ex-wine merchant and his confederate were

tried before the Paris Criminal Court and found guilty of murder. For some extraordinary reason, however, the jury added "extenuating circumstances" to their verdict and this took away from the judge the power to inflict death. They were, however, consigned to a living death in one of the French convict settlements, and there they existed for a few miserable years before dying of inanition, overwork, and monotony.

Practically the whole of Madame Houet's fortune was inherited by her son, who died in an asylum, and eventually the money which had been the motive for a terrible crime passed into the coffers of the state, the widow's son leaving no heirs.

CHAPTER X

THE BOOTMAKER'S ROYAL WOOING

WHEN the Essen doctor advised Maria Hussmann, Frederick Krupp's "lady house-keeper," to try a course of thermal baths at Aix-la-Chapelle she was only too glad to do so. Maria was a typical German woman, heavy, solid, and, as she was in the late thirties, fond of boasting of her respectability. She styled herself "a noble lady," and she was in the habit of explaining to her acquaint-ances that she only "condescended" to manage Herr Krupp's domestic staff for him, having been tempted by an enormous salary, the latter being a tribute to her excellence and her social position. She always carried herself with great dignity, and Krupp, who had a comic admiration for what in Germany passes for good breeding, was rather proud of his employée's pride.

Of course, he readily granted her permission to make the journey to the favourite resort, and to stay there for at least a month. Maria, therefore, packed up her trunks, and started for Aix-la-Chapelle. The woman had a fairly large sum of money saved, and, anxious to meet the best people, she put up at a first-class hotel, and placed herself under the care of a physician with a European reputation. In this way she acquired position at once in the hotel. and while carefully suppressing the fact that she was the Cannon King's

housekeeper she let it be known that she derived her means from him.

Everybody thereupon assumed that she was a relation of Krupp's, and after that expressed no surprise that she should be so rich.

The tall woman with the red face, who looked so grotesque in her fashionable clothes, was most assiduous in following her doctor's orders, and she was soon a well-known figure amongst the patients, who came from all parts of the world. When the scores of impecunious German officers heard that she was actually related to the millionaire Krupp they crowded round her, and the widow took their admiration as due entirely to her personal charm! Every day she had more invitations to lunch than she could accept, and there was keen competition for the honour of escorting her to the theatre or opera. This was, indeed, life, and, large as was Frederick Krupp's monthly cheque, she began to look forward to the time when she would be independent of it, and would have an officer husband—the ambition of every German woman—and a home of her own to manage.

Then suddenly she met, purely by accident, a man who raised her ambitions even higher. Hitherto she had considered it bliss to hear a young officer of the Prussian Guards whisper insincerities into her ear, but once she became acquainted with a future King she forgot all other men.

It was a very hot afternoon in mid-August, 1897, when Maria, walking slowly between an avenue of trees, slipped on a piece of orange-peel, and she would have met with a serious accident had not a gentleman caught her in time. The shock, however, gravely affected her, and her rescuer had to escort her to a friendly seat to give her time to recover. There he waited politely until she signified that she was better, and it was only then that she took notice of him. She saw a man above

medium height with a saturnine countenance, dark eyes and a black moustache. She noticed that the expression of his mouth hovered between a sneer and a scowl, and somehow his grey suit and light Homburg hat failed to give a touch of relief to an exterior not at all pleasing. However, Maria was too great a " perfect lady " not to feel grateful for the service he had rendered her, and she thanked him, ending up by revealing her identity.

" I am charmed, madame," said the stranger, speaking in French. " My name is—but, no, I must respect my incognito. I am Count d'Este. You can know me by that." A profound bow followed, and the next moment the count had disappeared.

Marie went back to her hotel with the words " incognito " and " count " ringing in her ears. She was sure that the stranger had been impressed by her, and she was equally certain that he was a great man, for only monarchs and their heirs talked of travelling " incognito." He was undoubtedly something better than a count, although Maria had an exaggerated veneration for any title of nobility.

Of course, the " lady housekeeper from Essen " procured an *Almanach de Gotha* at the hotel, but as it was not illustrated, she could not identify the mysterious gentleman, and she might have given up the task had she not met him again at the same place the following day. On this occasion he came straight up to her, and in the most charming and natural manner entered into conversation, carefully inquiring first if she had suffered any ill-consequences from the previous day's mishap, and expressing the greatest delight when she declared that she was quite well again.

They parted after half an hour, the count in a sad voice informing her that owing to fear of being recognized and his incognito not being respected he could not ask her to be his guest at a restaurant. The remark

fired her curiosity, and she went at once to the public library, and within a quarter of an hour was surrounded by a score of books on the royal families of Europe. It took her, however, nearly two hours to solve the mystery, and it was a bound volume of the Paris *Figaro* that gave her the clue she was seeking.

"He's the Archduke Francis Ferdinand," she whispered to herself, and her body vibrated. "The heir to the throne! And we're such good friends! Now I'll have no difficulty in being received into the society that I've always longed to enter."

When she reached her hotel there was a retired German colonel waiting to take her for a promenade, and at any other time Maria would have given half her fortune to be seen in his company, but now she almost condescendingly begged him to excuse her, and as she lumbered up the stairs the colonel could only stand in the hall, stare after her, and mutter curses expressive of his surprise and anger. He had planned to marry the wealthy relative of Frederick Krupp, and so save himself from bankruptcy. But Frau Hussmann had no use for common colonels now. She could think only of her august friend, the heir to the throne of Austria; no one else mattered.

It was her intention to keep her discovery to herself, but when on the third day she found the "count" obviously waiting for her she could not restrain herself when after five minutes' promenading together she had yet to hear a word from him. The "count" was in one of his melancholy moods, but since seeing him last she had read in several papers how addicted he was to pessimism, and she had already come to the conclusion that her mission in life was to save him from melancholia, and give him a new interest in life.

"Your Imperial and Royal Highness"—she began.

But he started convulsively, and laid a warning hand on her arm.

"Ah, I see you have discovered my secret," he said with a most anxious expression. "Trust a woman's wit to get to the truth. You pierced my incognito, madame. But I am not angry. It is proof that you take an interest in an unhappy man. I thank you for it."

"Unhappy?" she echoed in amazement. "Your Royal Highness ——"

"My name is Franz—to my friends," he said, looking at her steadily, "and we are friends, are we not?"

Maria could scarcely speak, so excited was she by the honour. The Archduke Francis Ferdinand was so natural and such a delightful companion! That very day he told her how his uncle, the Emperor, was trying to force him to marry an archduchess he did not love, and he recounted scenes in the Hofburg at Vienna which simply enthralled Krupp's lady housekeeper, who felt that she was, indeed, taking a peep into the most exclusive Court in Europe.

"I can go nowhere without being pestered," said the melancholy archduke. "I have no real friends. The Czar and the Kaiser only invite me to their palaces to introduce me to princesses. I am considered merely a pawn on the chessboard of Europe, and they never seem to think that I have a heart like other men, and that I long for a sweet, sympathetic wife."

He pressed her hand and looked into her eyes, and Maria Hussmann had difficulty in keeping on her feet, so overcome was she by emotion as she walked in that shady avenue and knew that she was being made love to by the future Emperor of Austria and King of Hungary.

"You understand now why I am in Aix-la-Chapelle," he resumed after a pause. "I can experience a little liberty here, and by paying cash for everything I have no need to reveal my identity. Of course I dare not draw cheques on my bankers, for that would give me

away completely. Oh, madame, I am thankful that I came here, for I have never been so happy since I met you."

The courtship was not a long one: indeed, it was much too short for the romantic woman. Nearly every afternoon she met the archduke, and he always had some fresh story to tell her of the Hofburg—the Kaiser's secret visits there, the drawing up of important treaties at midnight, the "removing" of political enemies, and the real meaning of various public actions of the emperor's. Incidentally he enlightened Marie as to the real character of Frederick Krupp. He was, of course, very sorry to have to draw the line at the millionaire, he said, even if Madame was a relative of the Cannon King's; but Marie hastened to dissociate herself from her "relation," explaining that she had a fortune independent of him, and that if ever she married she would not want to see too much of the Kaiser's friend.

A fortnight after the accident the archduke formally asked Marie to be his wife. She had been expecting the proposal for days, but she was surprised almost into hysterics when he actually made the offer. It seemed too good to be true. Aix-la-Chapelle was then crowded with beauties of all sorts and conditions. Some of the loveliest heiresses in Europe were to be seen daily in the town. The archduke had only to reveal himself to be flattered and courted by them, and yet he had chosen her! It was undoubtedly the greatest compliment she could possibly receive.

In the faintest of tones she said "Yes," and the archduke bowed over her hand, and impressed a respectful kiss upon it. "Just like one would expect from a prince," said the lady housekeeper later when describing that moment of blissful triumph.

"Of course, we'll be married at once," said Franz Ferdinand, who was the most attentive and enthusi-

astic of lovers. "Until you are my wife I shall not know a moment's peace, for if the Emperor got to know of my matrimonial plans he would have you kidnapped, Maria, and I should be left to mourn your loss."

The idea of the Emperor abducting this sixteen stone of solid German flesh would have struck anyone but Maria as comic. She, however, was too great an admirer of herself and too romantic to see anything absurd in the idea.

"I am ready for you at any time, Franz," she said in a flutter. "You know I am yours for ever now."

How delightful it was to meet the archduke every day after dusk and discuss the question of immediate marriage! They made plans, only to unmake them at their next meeting. Once for a period of three days Krupp's housekeeper had to live without seeing her fiancé, but, as he explained on his return to Aix-la-Chapelle, he had been unexpectedly recalled to Vienna to take part in a Council of State at the Hofburg.

"Again the Emperor talked of my marrying one of my cousins," he said with a scowl. "He little realizes that I am about to wed the girl of my heart, and one whom I mean to make my Empress when the right time comes."

Once more they fell to discussing the best place to get married in. Various Continental cities were mentioned, but rejected, and eventually the archduke's suggestion that they should travel to London at once, go through the marriage ceremony at a register office, and then in the presence of a priest, and afterwards return to Aix-la-Chapelle, was adopted. From there Francis Ferdinand was to inform his uncle as to what had happened, and prepare for his entry into Austria with his bride by his side.

"Once you are mine, even the Emperor will not be able to separate us," he assured her confidently, "and you can always rely upon my love and protection. I

am sure the Austrians and Hungarians will take my lovely bride to their hearts."

With the venue settled upon there was only one thing more to do, and that was for the archduke to send for " a few thousand marks " for the expenses of their wedding and subsequent honeymoon. He spoke so glibly of his immense fortune that poor Maria did not dare to refer to the fifty thousand marks she had in the bank at Essen. However, he spared her any embarrassment by laughingly advising her to take whatever money she had out of the German banks in case " the Emperor, my uncle, should try to deprive you of it." Maria accordingly sent instructions to her bankers, and shortly she had two thousand five hundred pounds in her possession, but only for a short time, for she handed it over to " Franz " for safe keeping on his suggestion.

The portly housekeeper and the melancholy archduke stole out of Aix-la-Chapelle late one night, and, travelling by a circuitous route, reached London two days later. They were both dead tired, but nevertheless very happy, and for the time being the Austrian heir seemed to have become another man. He could laugh and joke and talk rapturously of the love he bore his bride, and he was all impatience for their brief journey to the register office in the neighbourhood of the Strand.

London was crowded at the time. In the previous June Queen Victoria had celebrated her Diamond Jubilee, and if all the royalties had departed there were sufficient notable sight-seers from all corners of the earth to make the great city more than usually interesting.

" It is the best time for us," said the archduke, beaming upon Maira as they prepared to leave the hotel for the register office. " These Londoners have had so much royalty in their midst lately that they won't trouble to bother about me."

The dingy register office seemed to Maria Hussmann a veritable Fairyland setting for her romance when she stood beside Francis Ferdinand, and the wheezy official turned them into man and wife in the most matter-of-fact manner. She regretted that they had to give false names, but she was well aware that that small fraud would not invalidate the marriage.

A couple of clerks, called in, and rewarded with half a sovereign each, officiated as witnesses, and then Maria and her princely husband went out into the sunshine and tried to realize that the wonderful event had happened.

They had a merry little lunch for two at the Savoy Hotel, and in the afternoon they went for a drive through London. At night they had a box at one of the principal theatres, and Francis Ferdinand talked of taking her down to Windsor to see the Queen.

"Her Majesty has a womanly heart, and she will sympathize with us," he declared. How Maria's heart beat when she listened to him talking so familiarly of the crowned heads of Europe! "She'll stand by us, and she's the most powerful woman in the world. I know Wilhelm will bluster and Nicholas shed tears over my supposed loss of dignity, but I don't care."

Maria had agreed to keep their marriage a secret until her husband had chosen the right moment to break the news to his uncle, the Emperor Francis Joseph, and what with daily drives, visits to the theatres, and exciting plans for a tour of the Courts of Europe, she let a whole week go by in London without having broken her promise. Yet she wished that she could tell some of the people at the *Savoy*, especially those fashionable dames who were in the habit of regarding her with unfavourable looks. It would make them treat her respectfully. It was all very well for Francis Ferdinand to wish for privacy, but she was crazy with anxiety to astonish Europe with news of her exploit.

She must have dropped hints in the hearing of her maid, for between lunch and afternoon tea at the *Savoy* one mild September day she found a pleasant-mannered gentleman beside her, who opened a conversation, and deftly extracted a statement from her concerning her husband. This person happened to be a journalist, and, the same day, the wires were busy conveying the startling information that the heir to the throne of Austria had married Maria Hussmann, Frederick Krupp's lady housekeeper!

Meanwhile the bridegroom had also read the statement in a London paper, and without a trace of annoyance had questioned his wife. Maria confessed that she had been unable to resist the temptation to proclaim her pride and happiness, and he did not reprove her harshly. It was only human, after all, he said, for girls do not marry archdukes every day, so he kissed her and went downstairs, and she never saw him again.

A third person read about the affair with, perhaps, more interest than anybody else, and he was the real Francis Ferdinand. He was staying at his palace in Hungary, and the announcement of his marriage tickled even his dormant sense of humour. Three years were to elapse before he was to become the husband of the Countess Sophy Chotek, later Duchess of Hohenberg, and seventeen ere their double murder was to precipitate the greatest of all wars.

There was no difficulty in exposing the fraud, but when a detective from Scotland Yard called at the hotel he found only a weeping bride. Her husband had disappeared, and she was desolate. The truth was broken to her, and a benevolent lady in London made arrangements for her to return to Essen. The authorities had no use for her now. Their energies were concentrated on discovering the retreat of the impostor.

His history was a peculiar one. Johann Schmidt—his real name—was the son of a Berlin bookmaker, who

after numerous terms of imprisonment had become an inmate of a criminal lunatic asylum. He escaped from this prison by impersonating one of the doctors, and, having made his way to Aix-la-Chapelle, wooed and won the impressionable lady housekeeper from Essen.

The impostor was not, however, brought to trial, as Maria would not prosecute him. All she wished was to be allowed to bury herself in obscurity. But she was scarcely more annoyed than the Chauvinistic German journalists that her husband was not the real Simon Pure.

"No wonder he could pose so successfully as Francis Ferdinand," one of them wrote, "he was for six years in a lunatic asylum."

CHAPTER XI

THE BOGUS SIR RICHARD DOUGLAS

THE most remarkable fact about Richard Douglas, professional swindler, was that he kept a record of every one of his crimes, as well as a profit-and-loss balance-sheet, which he drew up at the end of each year. His diary was an astonishing document, and had it not been for the craft and obvious guilt of the impostor it might have been used as evidence to prove that he was not quite right in his head. Douglas, however, was too resourceful a thief to be a lunatic, and for some years he victimized all classes in London, where he posed as a baronet and committed depredations upon the trusting and unsuspicious.

The impostor was a man of venerable aspect, with kindly blue eyes and a soft, ingratiating manner. He was born with the name of Douglas, but as his father was a small tradesman in a Surrey village Richard thought he had better disown him, and when he had failed many times to earn an honest living he blazoned forth as "Sir Richard Douglas of Orpington House, Kent," and made his two elder sons partners in his criminal enterprises.

He was an insinuating rascal, and the tradespeople whom he interviewed were easily taken in by his plausible tongue. When he went to a well-known jeweller in Bond Street to select a "present for my wife, Lady Douglas," he had not the slightest difficulty in persuading the merchant to let him have a five hundred

guinea diamond necklace on approval. Most swindlers would have been content to disappear with the necklace and realize its value, but "Sir Richard" was more ambitious and greedy, for he was back again in the shop the same afternoon, and, greatly to the gratification of the jeweller, announced that "her ladyship" had been fascinated by the necklace, and that he wished to pay for it there and then.

The impostor drew a cheque for six hundred pounds, and, remarking that his own bank would be closed before he could get to it, induced the jeweller to give him a receipt for the necklace and seventy-five pounds in cash. Of course, the cheque came back marked "No account," and not for many a long day did he see his customer again.

While the "baronet" was busy on swindles of this nature his two sons were equally active. They lacked, of course, the suave polish of their father, but they were bright, intelligent youths, and they could pose as army officers anxious to spend the generous allowance their father, "Sir Richard Douglas," made them. The credulous traders willingly cashed cheques for the young Douglases, and were left eventually with bits of paper as their only souvenirs of their simplicity and trustfulness.

A few months' swindling provided Douglas with sufficient capital to rent an expensive house at Ascot, which became his headquarters, and it was to it that he would retire every week-end from the stress and strain of London. Every Monday morning, however, he would be driven in his carriage to the station to catch the train to London, and to start another week's "work." He dressed for each swindle, and played many characters. On one occasion after having entertained some of the leading people at Ascot to dinner he returned to town the following morning, donned the attire of a broken-down clergyman, and cajoled a large

sum from the credulous by a story of ill-health and poverty and a starving wife and children. But generally he was the well-dressed man of the world, and boldly swindled tradespeople under the name of "Sir Richard Douglas."

He had, of course, many narrow escapes. Once he absent-mindedly entered a jeweller's shop—diamonds and gold and silver articles specially appealed to him, because they were easily convertible into hard cash—which he had defrauded only a fortnight earlier. The moment the proprietor saw him he identified him as the man who had given a worthless cheque in exchange for a diamond ring worth a hundred and fifty guineas, but he pretended not to recognize the self-styled "baronet," and he entered into negotiations with "Sir Richard," who was plainly on the warpath again. Now Douglas had that morning told his elder son, Philip, to hang about in the vicinity of the shop, so that when he emerged from it he might unostentatiously pass on to him the spoils, as the impostor intended to steal a few rings, as well as obtain others by false pretences. The wary jeweller, however, was so unusually alert that "Sir Richard" realized the situation.

He was in a tight corner now, for in addition to the presence of the proprietor of the shop a brawny assistant was keeping guard at the door. The "baronet," however, exhibited no sign of fear or mental distress. He just casually glanced out of the window, and raised his handkerchief to his left cheek and brushed it lightly. It was a signal to his son on the other side of the road, and it meant that he was in difficulties.

Philip Douglas was a real chip of the old block, and in a moment he devised a plan to save his venerable parent. Walking briskly into the shop where "Sir Richard" was the only customer—of course, the impostor always selected the least busiest part of the day for his frauds—he peremptorily laid his hand on

his father's arm, and in curt tones expressed his delight at having at last captured him.

"It's a bit of luck for you that I was passing and recognized this fellow," he said to the astonished jeweller. "Do you know that he is one of the greatest swindlers in London? I have been looking for him for over a year. Take my advice and see if he has robbed you of anything."

Immediately the door was locked, and the "detective" and the other two men stood round the pale-faced and trembling culprit, who at that very moment held in his hands a diamond tiara which was worth a thousand pounds. But he was so terrified now that he seemed not to know where he was and what he was doing.

The jeweller was so excited at the prospect of getting even with the man who had swindled him a fortnight before that he instantly preferred a charge against "Sir Richard," and, furthermore, at the suggestion of the "detective" added another one, accusing him of trying to obtain the tiara by false pretences. This was just what both the rogues wanted.

"Then you will be good enough to make a parcel of that tiara," said the "detective," with an air of authority which was irresistible. "You will carefully seal it too. I shall have to hand it over to my superior officer to be used as evidence at the trial. Of course I will give you a receipt for it."

The jeweller hastened to obey, and ten minutes later Philip Douglas left the shop and stepped into a four-wheeler with his father and the diamond tiara. The "detective" shouted out the address of a police station, nodded curtly to the jeweller, and drove off. That night at Ascot the family gloated over the acquisition of a prize which would bring them in six hundred pounds at least, and leave a big profit for the receiver of stolen goods.

But the biggest *coup* of all was achieved by the

"baronet" posing as a messenger. It happened that he was chatting with the manager of a diamond merchant's shop when the latter observed that Lady Chesterfield had given them an order to reset a collection of very valuable stones which she had just received under the will of a relative. They were reputed to be worth twenty thousand pounds, and that afternoon the manager was to call at her ladyship's town house to receive the precious parcel. On hearing this "Sir Richard" brought the interview to an end, murmured that he was due back at his country seat to entertain a Cabinet Minister and his wife, and having got outside rushed to the nearest post office, obtained Lady Chesterfield's address, and drove to it. His respectable appearance was in his favour, and he was admitted at once, but her ladyship's secretary would not hear of handing over the diamonds until "the manager" established his identity. It was a critical moment, and had Douglas not been an accomplished swindler he would have bolted, but he held his ground, and by sheer personal magnetism won the secretary over. He had a good memory, and he was able to recall many of the statements the manager had made to him, retailing intimate details of previous transactions with Lady Chesterfield which convinced the secretary that he was what he represented himself to be.

Within a week the whole of the stones were in the possession of a well-known Continental "fence," whose place of business was in Amsterdam, and the Douglas banking account was increased by nine thousand pounds. Every morning for weeks the happy family at Ascot enjoyed the newspaper references to the great mystery, and congratulated themselves that the secretary's and the manager's descriptions of the swindler resembled anybody but the bogus "baronet."

Continual success so impressed the impostor that he came to the conclusion that he was under the special

protection of Providence. He began a diary, and the entries that followed were both amusing and amazing. Some are worth reproducing, for the police subsequently captured two of these astonishing compilations, which gave a complete history of his swindles and impostures.

"Jan. 5th. Phaeton and horse seized. Fear exposure at Ascot, and chance up there. Fear we must cut."

"Jan. 7th. All day ill. Row about stable. Forcible possession taken of it. Row all day with one person or another. Fearful how things will end. Three boys at home idle, all ordering things."

"Jan. 18th. Went to boys' to dinner. Champagne. Very merry. Providence not quite deserted us."

When he raised three hundred pounds in two days by means of worthless cheques he celebrated the "triumph" by writing in his diary:

"My labours ended for the week. Over three hundred to the good. Paid off local tradesmen—genuine cheques. Gave notice to cook. Must get some one who understands serving fish. Looking forward to a quiet week-end. Must read Bible regularly."

He was really fond of reading the Bible, and he spent his leisure at his home in studying it and keeping his diary up to date. When his sons went off to the races he would potter about in the garden, apparently the most respectable and virtuous man in the kingdom.

But every Monday morning Douglas would descend upon London, and when the diaries were bulging with records of swindles of all descriptions, and almost every tradesman in the West End was on his guard, he turned for a time to begging-letter writing, at which he proved himself an adept. He was the starving widow with eight children; the lonely widow of an Indian officer; the one-legged and one-armed hero of half a dozen campaigns; the old woman who had worked for the poor all her life, and was now in poverty herself; and

a dozen other characters. These rôles produced plenty of money, not large sums, but enough to pay expenses at Ascot and pass the time until " Sir Richard Douglas " and his greater misdeeds were forgotten by the public if not by his victims.

On one occasion he resumed his clerical garb, and went round collecting subscriptions for an aged missionary and his wife. By working ten hours a day for a fortnight he collected several hundred pounds, and he even persuaded two bishops to contribute through their chaplains, although as a rule bishops are very careful to make inquiries before patrionzing anything of this sort. Douglas' sympathetic air, however, clinched the matter, and by showing the bishops' subscriptions he was able subsequently to swindle scores of persons who would not otherwise have been taken in.

By now the police were on the look out for the bogus baronet who had ruined more than one shopkeeper by his frauds. But Douglas was a quick-change artist, and his keen eyes were ever on the watch. He walked freely about London, and he always spotted the detectives, and decamped before they recognized him. Some of the best sleuths were put on his track, but he fooled them all.

He was once tracked to a house where he was trying to persuade the occupant, a rich old lady, to buy a tract of land in Scotland which he did not own, and it seemed certain that the impostor would be captured, but, scenting danger, he ran upstairs into a room, where he found some female clothes, and shortly afterwards he walked through the kitchen—where a policeman was keeping guard—and out of the house by the side door. The policeman explained later that he thought " she was the cook going for her afternoon out."

This escape, however, was so narrow that the " baronet " returned at once to Ascot, and lay low for a month. Meanwhile, his sons had been making the

money fly. Thousands of pounds went to the book-makers at Ascot and other racecourses, and all three of them were engaged to girls with expensive tastes, which had to be satisfied. No wonder the old hypocrite recorded in his diary:

"It is sad to think of the extravagance of youth. If we misuse the money Providence has given us we will experience poverty. I have spoken seriously to the boys, but they will not heed me. Note. Special hopes for the success of the A.T. scheme."

The latter was, however, not successful, for it was an attempt at a religious swindle which failed owing to the activities of the police.

Another failure was his short-lived matrimonial agency, which was to be stocked with three "baronets," who were supposed to be on the look out for wives. The "baronets" were to be impersonated by his sons. It came to an abrupt termination by the theft of the preliminary prospectus by a servant, who had to be bought off later at a cost of five hundred pounds, an item of expenditure which nearly broke the old man's heart, according to his diary.

These and other matters contrived to make "Sir Richard" nervy. His sons were devoting more time to pleasure than to business, and the knowledge that the authorities were doubling their efforts to catch him was ever-disturbing. But he could not remain inactive, for his brain was always teeming with plans for swindles, and he entered details of several in his diary, some of which he put into execution.

Amongst his acquaintances in London was a widow of fortune. She was in the late fifties, but despite that was not averse to marrying again, especially a man with a title, and "Sir Richard's" advances were not repulsed. Mrs. MacCormack had been left ten thousand a year by her husband, and the lady maintained a costly establishment in the neighbourhood

of London. Douglas was fascinated by her money. He knew that once she was his wife he would be able to get complete control of her and her fortune. She would obey him implicitly, and he could live at his ease, make his sons handsome allowances, and thoroughly enjoy life.

He therefore proposed to Mrs. MacCormack, who accepted "Sir Richard" with an emotion akin to enthusiasm, and immediately began to prepare to go through the marriage ceremony a second time. But Douglas insisted upon the engagement being kept a secret, pointing out that it was only for her sake that he did so.

"You will be accused of marrying me for my title, dear," he said in a sympathetic tone, "and that would hurt me terribly. Thank God, no one can accuse me of marrying for money. Your fortune may be large, but I think that it does not exceed the rent-roll of my Scottish estates."

Mrs. MacCormack was touched by his kindly forethought, and really kept the secret, although she was anxious to impress her acquaintances with the fact that she was about to become "Lady Douglas."

It was settled that the marriage should take place at St. George's, Hanover Square, and "Sir Richard" told the widow that the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of London had promised to assist at the ceremony if their engagements permitted. At the last moment it happened that both these prelates were detained elsewhere, at least Douglas said so, and to the rector was given the honour of officiating.

On the morning of the ceremony "Sir Richard" dressed himself with extreme care in the room he had taken at the fashionable West End hotel. It was eleven o'clock when he descended, and he was due at St. George's at twelve. A carriage was to take him there with his best man, who was his eldest son Philip, and the young

rogue was posing for the occasion as a friend and not a relative of the bridegroom-baronet.

Now, Philip Douglas, who was keenly interested in his father's matrimonial adventure, had out of mere curiosity made a few inquiries about Mrs. MacCormack, and he learnt that it was really true that she had ten thousand pounds a year, but on the day of the ceremony he discovered by sheer accident that under the provisions of her late husband's will she was to be deprived of every penny if she married again. So at half-past eleven Philip Douglas dashed into the hotel, seized his father by the arm, and drew him into a corner. There he confided to the old sinner the information that he was going to marry a woman, ancient and ugly, who would be penniless the moment the knot was tied. "Sir Richard" gasped, and then burst forth into imprecations against the widow for her "deceit." With tears in his eyes he said she had not been honest with him, and when he had regained his composure he and his son drove away to catch the train back to Ascot. Mrs. MacCormack arrived in due course at St. George's, Hanover Square, but the "baronet" never appeared, and she reached home in tears and feeling that she was the laughing-stock of London. Douglas entered all the details of the misadventure in his diary, and he severely censured the widow for not having been "honest" enough to tell him the truth.

For some reason, however, the "baronet" went to pieces after the abandonment of his wedding. Money suddenly became scarce, and creditors more persistent. A sheaf of debts contracted by his sons took him by surprise, but they had to be paid, and Douglas was left with only a few pounds in hand.

In the midst of the crisis he remembered having heard about a benevolent clergyman of the name of Hamilton, who had a large fortune, which he was in the habit of sharing with the poor. Douglas decided that he would

get a slice of it, and to achieve his purpose he became a clergyman again. This time he was supposed to be an elderly priest who had fallen upon evil times, and to play the part properly he took lodgings in a slum house owned by a friend and humble confederate. From there he wrote to Mr. Hamilton asking him to call upon a sick and poverty-stricken fellow-clergyman, who had no friends and no hope left in this world.

The appeal was cunningly worded, and the setting of the stage for the comedy was perfect. Douglas knew that if only Mr. Hamilton called he would be able to work upon his feelings to the extent of two hundred pounds at least. Anxiously he waited for a reply, and his joy was great when the owner of the house informed him that a clergyman was approaching.

The sham priest instantly returned to bed, and assuming a pained look prepared to receive the visitor. He heard the knock at the front door, and braced himself for the interview. Presently footsteps sounded on the stairs, and then the door opened and a clergyman entered, whose expression seemed to indicate a generous and credulous disposition.

Douglas was murmuring a prayer when the clergyman came to his side and looked down at him. Then he opened his eyes.

"You—you are the saintly Mr. Hamilton?" he asked in a quavering voice.

"No," was the startling answer. "I am Inspector Allen, and I hold a warrant for your arrest, Sir Richard."

It was a neat capture. The impostor was unable to extricate himself, and at the ensuing Sessions he and his sons were sentenced to imprisonment, and after that catastrophe nothing more was heard of the venerable swindler until a newspaper recorded his death in 1858.

CHAPTER XII

THE ENTERPRISING MRS. CHADWICK

THERE had been a sensational forgery in a certain Canadian town, and when the police announced that they had captured the criminal a huge crowd sought entrance to the Court where the case was to be tried. Those who managed to squeeze themselves in were astonished when they saw a slim, fair-haired girl, with dark, alluring eyes, standing in the dock, for Lydia Bigley, aged sixteen, was the forger!

The magistrates could hardly believe the evidence for the prosecution. It seemed incredible that such a beautiful girl could be an expert forger, but the police had accumulated all the facts, and there could be no doubt that the demure maiden who looked so modest, and who occasionally favoured the bench with a sweeping glance from beneath her long eyelashes, was the person who had tried to raise five thousand dollars by imitating a wealthy acquaintance's signature on a cheque.

The large-hearted men who judged Lydia did not intend to send her to gaol if they could help it, and after a brief consultation amongst themselves they acquitted her on the ground that she must have been insane when she committed the crime with which she had been charged.

It was a remarkable decision, and it did more credit to the magstrates' hearts than to their heads, but Lydia's magnetic eyes may have had something to do with

Lydia's first escape from prison. For years afterwards those fascinating orbs were busy at work. There were to be greater triumphs in store for her ere she was run to earth. The girl developed into an extraordinary woman. When she stepped out of the dock with an alluring smile her brain was busy evolving a method by which she could live luxuriously without having to work, and she deliberately chose a life of crime. For a year or two, however, she contented herself with blackmail. It was always easy for her to persuade some rich man that she had lost her heart to him, then get him into a compromising position, and afterwards proceed to levy blackmail as the price of her silence. The money so obtained did not provide her with more than her current expenses, and she was anxious to launch out as a society woman.

She did not, of course, confine herself to Canada. The rich country of the United States presented a promising field to her, and in turn she visited many of the principal cities, where she posed in turn as the daughter of a British general, the widow of an earl, the niece of a former American president, and so on until she had at one time or another claimed close relationship with many of the mighty ones of the earth.

All this, however, only prepared her for the great and final swindle, and a very brief career as a "society clairvoyante" in an Ohio town was merely an incident. Lydia was much more ambitious now. It took an immense amount of hard cash to coax fashionable dresses and fascinating hats out of the shops, and she simply loved both. In the hour of her desperation, when two former victims declined to part with any more cash, and her clairvoyance business was closed by the police, she remembered her first exploit in criminality, and decided to chance her luck again as a forger. But she was not going to be content with a small sum now. She was the most popular woman in the district where she

MRS. CHADWICK

temporarily resided. She set the fashion, and was determined to live up to her proud position.

Up to this time Lydia had not found a man sufficiently rich to make it worth her while to marry. She had had numerous affairs with married men, and not a few bachelors had actually proposed to her, but there was something against every one of them, and it was not until she met handsome and popular and well-to-do Dr. Leroy Chadwick, of Cleveland, that she consented to change her name. But if she had been dangerous as Lydia Bigley, she was doubly so as Mrs. Leroy Chadwick, because her status as the wife of the respected practitioner gave her almost unlimited opportunities for swindling, and she took full advantage of them.

Her extravagance knew no bounds. She bought on credit thousands of pounds worth of jewellery and furs. If she met a girl she liked she would take her to Europe for a pleasure trip. Once she brought four young ladies with her to London, Paris, and the principal Italian and German cities. The trip cost four thousand pounds, but it was none of her cheapest experiments in trying to get rid of money. For instance, she and her husband occupied a large house standing in its own grounds, which she insisted upon refurnishing, regardless of expense. A little later she decided to have it redecorated throughout, and she agreed to pay a fantastic price to the contractors on the understanding that they began and finished the work while she was watching a performance at the local theatre! They managed to keep their word, and Mrs. Chadwick's house became for the time being a show place.

Another of her fads was a habit of giving costly presents on the slightest provocation. To impress a local piano dealer with her importance she walked into his showroom one day and counted the number of instruments he happened to have in stock. There were twenty-seven of them all told, and Mrs. Chadwick

promptly gave him a list of twenty-seven of her friends, and told him to deliver one of his pianos to each with her compliments. Although somewhat taken aback at such an order, and hearing that Mrs. Leroy Chadwick always paid for her eccentricity, the piano dealer dared not doubt her word, and promised to deliver the instruments. Again she ordered a dozen costly clocks, one of which was made of gold, works and all. She kept the latter for herself, and gave away the others. Her servants came in for many of her gifts, and she decked out her cook with so many costly clothes that the good dame grew too big for her job, and gave notice on the ground that the work was undignified, and tended to ruin her wardrobe!

Of course, these ventures in extravagance could not have been accomplished without a considerable amount of ready money. American tradesmen are not all "mugs," and no matter how beautiful Lydia Chadwick may have been, had she not been in a position to pay her tradesmen, they would have spoiled her little schemes by pressing for the settlement of their accounts.

Dr. Chadwick could not, however, keep pace with her expenditure, and she fell back upon forgery, and now she began her greatest exploit, which, before it landed her in the dock of an unsympathetic criminal Court, enabled her to handle nearly a million dollars.

One day she drove in a costly carriage, with coachman and footman in attendance, to the bank, and with impressive dignity walked in and requested the manager to advance the modest sum of fifty thousand pounds. Naturally the official asked for security. Mrs. Chadwick yawned and opened her purse bag.

"I presume you have heard of my uncle, Mr. Andrew Carnegie?" she asked sarcastically.

The banker declared that he knew a great deal about the millionaire, whose name will for ever be associated with Pittsburg iron and free libraries.

"Well, then," said the lady, with her nose in the air, "here are two notes signed by him. You can see they are worth £150,000. Perhaps you consider them sufficient security for such a paltry sum as I want you to lend me for a few weeks."

They were, of course, ample security, but the manager, a shrewd business man, determined to take no risks. He, therefore, politely hinted that while he would not dare to doubt the genuineness of the signature of the famous millionaire, "just for form's sake," he would like to have a responsible person swear that the writing was Mr. Carnegie's. He rather expected Mrs. Chadwick to be offended, but she merely told him that the gentleman who had delivered the notes to her that morning was still in town. "And as he is Mr. Carnegie's New York lawyer I think he ought to know his handwriting."

The lawyer was fetched, and he not only identified the signatures, but added the overwhelming testimony that he had been present himself when Mr. Carnegie had drawn up and signed the notes. After that there was nothing to be done but to credit Mrs. Chadwick with fifty thousand pounds, and deposit the precious securities in the safe.

A month later the whole of the money had evaporated. Clamouring tradesmen had had to be satisfied, advances from money-lenders liquidated, and scores of persons to be impressed by large orders for various goods, for which cash was paid. Meanwhile the Carnegie notes rested securely in the strong room of the bank, for it was some time ere the manager was to know that they were worthless forgeries, and that Mrs. Chadwick did not know Mr. Carnegie, neither had she ever seen him in her life!

Mrs. Chadwick certainly displayed a very masculine ability in her criminal exploits. It was a stroke of genius to carry a bunch of important-looking papers to one of the leading banks, and hire a special safe by

the year, for the rent of which she obtained a receipt. Armed with this she was able to persuade quite a number of rich and fashionable Americans that she had a million pounds worth of securities in the safe which she did not wish to dispose of because the markets were low, and to sell out would have been to invite a heavy loss. She varied her story as occasion demanded, one of her favourite yarns being that the securities were bequeathed to her on the condition that she did not sell them outright. She could, however, promise very large interest to those who trusted her, and it was an offer to pay twenty per cent that induced one millionaire to hand her his cheque for two hundred thousand dollars and not ask for anything more than a written receipt.

Her swindle was, of course, only a copy of the Humbert fraud, and, considering that she put it into operation a year after the sentence on the famous Madame Humbert, it is extraordinary that she should have been able to find victims. The only explanation that has been advanced is that of hypnotism. Mrs. Chadwick had undoubtedly "hypnotic eyes," but it is doubtful if they alone charmed nearly a million out of some of the most astute business men the land of dollars has produced.

But her story of a vast fortune in a bank safe was generally believed. When she informed a keen-witted New York millionaire that if he advanced her twenty-five thousand dollars she would repay him twice as much within the year—the safe, she declared, was to be opened on a certain date, and the contents distributed as she decided—he actually took her word, and parted with the money he was never to see again. And this did not happen long ago. The date of the transaction was 1904, and that same man must have read all about Madame Humbert's trial and conviction less than twelve months previously.

It is not necessary to give further particulars of

this "safe" fraud. Mrs. Chadwick simply took the cash, and had a "high old time," and day and night her mansion was filled with guests. Her tradespeople were delighted. The fact that she paid them cash, and that most of them were too wary to take "shares" in the "safe" exploit, proved that some people at any rate ultimately benefited by the woman's amazing imposture.

One of her most fiendish exploits was to invite a well-known financier to dine with her and a few friends. This gentleman had declined to advance money on the strength of the mythical securities, and she had resolved to get even with him. She therefore retained friendly relations with him and unsuspectingly he accepted her invitation. When he arrived Mrs. Chadwick's only other guest was a pretty young girl, the daughter of a New York physician.

The dinner was a pleasant affair, but towards the close the financier became sleepy, greatly to his surprise, as he did not suspect that his hostess had purposely drugged both him and her only other guest. Anyhow, in the early morning, when he woke up, he found himself stretched on the floor, and a moment later Mrs. Chadwick appeared, and tearfully explained that in his "excited condition"—she meant intoxicated, but refrained from using that vulgar word—he had grossly insulted her girl friend. The long and the short of it was that he had to pay ten thousand dollars in blackmail, and of this sum the woman gave her girl confederate two hundred.

But at last the morning dawned when a certain victim of hers set out for the Wade National Bank in Cleveland, and presented the manager's receipt for the hire of the safe, together with the key and a written order from Mrs. Chadwick that the bearer was to be permitted to open the safe and take from it the valuable securities she had deposited there. Her emissary was a creditor

to the extent of eighty thousand dollars, and he was naturally very anxious to recoup himself for his outlay. Mrs. Chadwick had instructed him to select sufficient stocks and shares to realize his account plus twenty thousand dollars for interest, and then to send the rest to a firm of stockbrokers in New York with instructions to realize.

It must have been a very dramatic moment when the credulous creditor turned the key in the lock and the safe door opened on its hinges, and he must have felt pleased with himself when he saw the pile of important-looking documents which seemed to him to be valuable share certificates. But a moment later he realized that he had been grossly swindled, for the papers proved to be worthless.

The bubble had burst! Mrs. Chadwick was from that moment known as the Madame Humbert of America. How her creditors howled! How they were chaffed and ridiculed! A few would not reveal themselves once they guessed that there could be no redress. Nevertheless, stern measures were adopted, and a warrant was issued for the impostor's arrest.

Mrs. Chadwick had taken up her quarters in an expensive hotel in the early part of December, 1904. She intended to pass Christmas there, and the management had already consulted her as to her ideas of a really Christmasy entertainment. She was paying one hundred dollars a week for her rooms, and she had arrived with a fortune in jewels, and half a dozen personal servants. She was the uncrowned queen of the hotel, where the other visitors stood in groups and discussed her wonderful personality in awed accents.

She was destined, however, to spend that Christmas in gaol. One evening when Mrs. Chadwick, resplendent in a marvellous Parisian creation, and wearing jewels which must have cost fifty thousand dollars at least, was chatting at the dinner-table, the manager came to

her and respectfully intimated that a couple of gentlemen wished to see her. She graciously answered that she would receive them in her drawing-room. Visitors were every-day occurrences with her, and these, she thought, were local celebrities, who had come to enlist her support for their Christmas charities.

Without the slightest suspicion that anything was wrong she entered her luxurious drawing-room, and with a smile inquired the strangers' business. Now American detectives have a habit of being brutally frank, and they lost no time in informing her that she was their prisoner, and that the charge against her was that of having obtained nearly a million dollars by fraud.

The news stunned her, and for a moment or two she stood motionless. Then she collapsed in a faint, and it was some time before the two detectives could get her downstairs and into the waiting cab.

Mrs. Chadwick had started her criminal career with a triumph over the soft-hearted Canadian magistrates who had so obligingly decided that she was too pretty to be evil, and, recalling that triumph, she resolved to fight for her liberty with her eyes and not her tongue. When she was brought into the dock she fainted again, knowing that she looked quite bewitching when in that state, and that her forlorn condition must wring pity from even her worst enemies. But her programme did not work out as she expected it would. Instead of a host of sympathetic men crowding round her and proffering good-natured advice, she was roughly brought to by a couple of hard-featured wardresses. Then she was installed in the dock again, and compelled to listen to the story of her life as told by a prosecuting lawyer, who was quite unaffected by Mrs. Chadwick's "magnetic eyes." He mercilessly raked up her past, recounted how she had ruined scores of men and women, how she had been one of the most dangerous blackmailers in

America, and how she had adopted Madame Humbert's "safe" swindle, with disastrous results for scores of impressionable men.

It was a formidable indictment, and the recital of it blotted out at once the beauty of the prisoner. She was shown to be an utterly unscrupulous impostor, a woman who had declared war against society, and who had repaid her husband's love by making his name a byword throughout the land.

She had, of course, a clever lawyer to plead for her, and every possible effort was made to secure an acquittal, but there was no question of insanity now. She was too clever to be an imbecile, and the judge had not the slightest hesitation in giving her ten years' imprisonment.

When she had been convicted, and before she tottered from the dock into the oblivion of the gaol, the interesting fact was mentioned that she had been in the habit of wearing a belt containing ten thousand dollars, with the object of taking to flight if her liberty was ever threatened. The celerity with which the police had acted, however, resulted in the capture of this little "nest egg" for her creditors, although it is to be feared that each of them received a very small proportion of the amount he lost through his faith in the word of the greatest female impostor since Madame Humbert was convicted. It should be recorded that her husband had nothing whatever to do with her frauds. He was, in fact, one of her victims and when he married her he had no idea that she was then an ex-convict.

After the failure of her attempt to secure a new trial Mrs. Chadwick was sent to the Ohio State Penitentiary at Columbus, and there she died on Oct. 10th, 1907, at the age of forty-eight.

CHAPTER XIII

THE MILLION DOLLAR RANCH GIRL

ONE summer day a beautiful Mexican girl was sitting motionless on horseback gazing across the ranch of which her adopted father was the owner, when a young man, tall, of good appearance, and pleasant address, came up and respectfully raised his cap. The girl instantly smiled a welcome, for in that remote region strangers were few, and it was the custom of the country to welcome and entertain them. But this young man had no desire to be taken to the ranch house. He wanted to have a chat with the beauty, and as he was handsome and ingratiating the impressionable girl readily consented to give him half an hour of her time.

James Addison Beavis, for that was the stranger's name, told a wonderful story to the dark-eyed damsel, who listened as if spellbound.

"This is not the first time I have seen you," he said in a pleasing, confidential manner that was delightfully intimate and brotherly. "I have often watched you galloping about on the ranch, but I wanted to be quite certain that you are the person I have been looking for for years before I spoke."

"Looking for me!" she exclaimed in wonderment.

"Yes," he said quickly, and dropped his voice. "Do you know that your real name is Peralta, and that with my help you will soon be the owner of lands in Arizona and New Mexico worth one hundred million dollars?"

She gasped. Could it be possible? She was half-Spanish, half-Mexican, and therefore hot-tempered and romantic, and it was easy for her to persuade herself that she was something better than the adopted daughter of a Mexican ranch-owner, who had taken her into his house out of pure charity. Dolores felt that she had been meant for something better.

Beavis, who was a cute man of the world, and possessed of an eloquent tongue, sat beside her on the trunk of an old tree, and explained why it was that a huge tract of land was awaiting an owner, land which would make its eventual possessor a multi-millionaire. He said that hundreds of years ago a Spanish king had made over the rich lands of Peralta to a certain Spanish nobleman, whose descendants had enjoyed the revenues, until, owing to various misfortunes, there seemed to be a lack of heirs. The property had then been taken charge of by the United States Government, and its revenues had been, and still were, accumulating, but he had been inspired to make an independent research, and he could now prove by legal documents that Dolores was the only living descendant of the last owner of the huge estate. He promised to produce the necessary birth and marriage certificates which established his contention that Dolores Peralta was the legal proprietor of an estate half the size of Great Britain.

Dolores herself had only a vague idea as to how she had become an orphan, but the fascinating and persuasive Beavis had the whole story at his finger-ends. He declared that when she was an infant her parents had been drowned whilst crossing a river, and that Dolores had been rescued by an Indian squaw, who had later on abandoned her. After passing through various hands she had come into the keeping of the Mexican who had adopted her, and with him she had spent the last fifteen of her eighteen years, passing as his daughter, and generally understood to be his heir.

But now that she was told by Beavis that she had only to trust her affairs to him to become worth £20,000,000, the ranch seemed but a poor and sordid affair and unworthy of her. She wanted to obtain her rights and to take her place in society, and the more she listened to Beavis the more inclined she was to give him not only charge of her affairs, but also the keeping of her heart. For Beavis was an expert talker, and Dolores was not the only victim of his honeyed tongue.

They made a compact there and then that Beavis was to go ahead with the task of obtaining the property for her. Dolores had, of course, no money to advance for expenses, but this did not worry Beavis. He went to New York, and obtained an interview with Mackay, the famous millionaire, who earned the name of "The Silver King." Mr. Mackay was so impressed that he advanced sufficient capital to enable Beavis to proceed to Spain to prosecute his inquiries.

Of course, the whole affair was a barefaced swindle. There was certainly a Peralta estate awaiting a claimant and it was worth twenty million pounds, but Dolores, the girl of the ranch, was not a Peralta at all. Beavis, however, meant to get that huge fortune, even if he had to share it with the girl. It was in his opinion a stake well worth risking much for. He was an expert forger, and his knowledge of human nature was immense. Besides that he had the great gift of patience, and he was willing to spend years if necessary perfecting his plans before putting them into execution.

It was easy enough for him to forge birth, marriage and death certificates, as well as a deed of gift conveying the property to the Peralta family, but he wanted something else besides documents. Dolores, who was in reality of obscure birth, looked the aristocrat to the life. She was undeniably beautiful, and her carriage was the last word in haughty aloofness, though the girl was a charming companion when with those she liked. Beavis

had found her delightful, and whilst he was prosecuting his inquiries in Spain he never forgot the beauty of the lonely ranch.

Day after day he toured the curiosity shops of Madrid, delving into dusty cellars and examining everything, picture, paper, or curio, which bore the stamp of age. Only Beavis would have devoted so much time to a single detail when practically his case was ready, but his perseverance was rewarded when he came upon two ancient miniatures which were strikingly like Dolores. They represented two Spanish ladies who had existed a hundred years earlier, and they might have been mother and daughter, judging by their resemblance to one another, but they interested the impostor for the reason that their features were exact replicas of Dolores'.

From the moment they became Beavis' by purchase he called them miniatures of two of Dolores' ancestors, and he exhibited them as her great-great-grandmother and a remote aunt. They were Peraltas, and bore the Peralta cast of countenance—at least Beavis said so, and he professed to be the only living authority on a famous Spanish family which had come upon evil days.

Every week he heard from Dolores, and it ought to have been obvious to him that the girl was thinking less of the twenty millions than she was of her "gallant knight errant." She was really more concerned with his welfare than with the prospect of becoming the richest woman in the world. Beavis smiled as he read her somewhat artless compositions. It was the money he was after, and he was too clever an adventurer and impostor to have any time for love-making, although Dolores was undoubtedly a beauty.

Thanks to the financial help of "The Silver King," Beavis was able to do his work thoroughly in Spain before returning to the United States, and when he arrived in New York he brought with him a pile of

documents bearing on the Peralta family. The two miniatures occupied a prominent place, and the forged deed of gift, so skilfully executed that Beavis confidently handed it over to experts for examination, was also to the fore. Those who had heard of Beavis' activities were greatly excited, for it is not often that a claimant comes forward to an estate worth in American money one hundred million dollars.

But before he came into Court on behalf of Dolores there was one important thing to be done. Beavis had devoted years of labour to the task. He was going to risk a year's imprisonment, and he considered it only right that, to make assurance doubly sure as far as his reward was concerned, Dolores should become his wife.

It was a casual remark in a New York restaurant that decided him to propose to her. A friend, who was a world-renowned handwriting expert, and who had pronounced the forged deed of gift to be genuine, laughingly tried to estimate the number of proposals the heiress would have when it was known who and what she was. That night Beavis took the train to the town nearest the ranch, where by arrangement Dolores met him to hear all about his adventures.

The meeting was a strange one. Beavis was full of the subject which engrossed him day and night, and he wanted to go at once into details, but Dolores seemed to be uninterested in everything and everybody except him. She wished to know how he was, and if he was well and happy, and as she sat beside him her dark eyes constantly travelled in his direction, and there were tears in them sometimes.

Dolores was, as a matter of fact, desperately in love with Beavis. At the back of her brain there was a shrewd suspicion that there was no Peralta estate, and that she was only his partner in a gigantic swindle, but she loved him, and that was sufficient for her.

It was of no importance if the Peralta property was a myth. Beavis had won her heart, and she had spent months of anxiety, fostered by a growing jealousy, because she feared that in the luxurious cities of Europe he would meet a girl who would make him forget the wild beauty of the ranch.

Beavis quickly realized the situation, and with a merry laugh and a few compliments asked her to marry him. He was not prepared for her answer. No sooner had he spoken than she flung herself at his feet, and passionately announced her intention of devoting the rest of her life to his welfare.

It was a real love romance within a sordid, miserable fraud. Beavis, who prided himself upon his knowledge of men and women, could not understand the love he had aroused in the breast of this veritable child of nature. He, who would have sold himself body and soul for money, was astounded that Dolores should be happier as his fiancée than as the prospective owner of twenty million pounds. She would look bored when he spoke of their future splendour when they came into the Peralta money, but if he referred, however obliquely, to her as his wife her face would light up and her manner change at once into that of a happy, delighted girl.

The old ranch-owner offered no objection to the match, and the marriage promptly took place in a remote town, none of those present being aware that this ceremony was to be the prelude to one of the biggest law cases in the history of the United States. Beavis was not in love with his bride. He wanted her money, but Dolores was enchantingly happy, and had she not known that she would have displeased her husband by the suggestion she would have asked him to retire from the Peralta case and let them find and make their own happiness in a little ranch away from the poverty and crimes of cities. But to Beavis nothing mattered

except the Peralta millions, and the day after the marriage ceremony he took his lovely bride to New York, where they established themselves in one of the leading hotels, there to await the opening of the suit before the Court of Claims.

The smooth and persuasive tongue of the bridegroom and the beauty and naturalness of the bride carried all before them in New York. Beavis had certainly done his work well, but when level-headed lawyers, suspicious by nature, met Mrs. Beavis they immediately capitulated. There is no other explanation of the extraordinary number of adherents they made for their cause.

They entertained lavishly, using the money which their guests had subscribed for the presentation of Dolores' case before the Courts. It might have been supposed that the ranch girl would have been at a disadvantage in such society, coming as she did from the heart of prarie-land, but because she insisted upon being herself she scored social triumph after social triumph.

The impostor was, of course, the happiest man in New York. It seemed impossible that he should fail. In fact, everybody agreed that the trial would be the most formal of affairs. His cleverness and Dolores' beauty were irresistible, and he would have to be a hard-headed, unfeeling judge who could resist the appeal her eyes made.

Backed by some of the leading business people in New York, his case, presented by a firm of lawyers justly renowned for its ability, and with his wife to cheer him on, Beavis went into Court certain that he would leave it one of the richest men in America. Dolores and he sat side by side whilst counsel argued before the judges and endeavoured to prove that the adopted daughter of the Mexican ranch-owner was the descendant of the Counts of Peralta, who had originally come from

Spain. Beavis gave his evidence with confidence and, of course, courage. When a man is playing for such a stake as twenty millions he requires both in abundance.

The end of the first day of the case foreshadowed an easy victory. Beavis was overjoyed, and Dolores was happy just because he was. By now, however, she had seen enough of the documents to guess that the whole claim was bogus. She was the daughter of nameless parents, and, no matter what the Court decided, she would never know who her forbears really were. It did not matter much to her, yet because she loved the impostor she became even more anxious for success than he was, and she knew that if anything went wrong it would break her heart.

Had the estate not been so enormous the United States Court of Claims would not have so doggedly resisted Beavis' claim, but the officials realized that it would be best for all concerned if the question of ownership was decided once and for all. Because of that they took the precaution to despatch an expert in pedigrees and old documents to Madrid, to go over the ground that Beavis had covered and to inquire especially into the history of the all-important deed of gift.

The claimant was not aware of this, if he had been it might have disturbed the serenity with which he faced the Court. But everything was going his way, and there was always his lovely and devoted wife to whisper that they were winning and that their suspense would soon be ended.

It is doubtful if there has ever been a case where an impostor has failed by such a narrow margin as Beavis did. The Government officials had been receiving regular reports from their emissary in Spain, and each one strengthened rather than weakened the claimant's case; accordingly, the presiding judge was actually drawing up a judgment in favour of Dolores when at the

eleventh hour a report came from Madrid which pointed to the fact that the Government agent had discovered that Beavis' deed of gift was a barefaced forgery.

Once that was known there was, of course, no chance for the impostor. It naturally followed that the history of all the other documents presented by Beavis was inquired into, and then the system of wholesale forgery came to light. Step by step his progress in his greatest imposture was traced. His numerous birth, death and marriage certificates were shown to be worthless; the dealer who had sold the miniatures to him was produced, and gave damaging evidence, and the impostor was left without a leg to stand upon.

The case came to a dramatic finish, the judge announcing unexpectedly that it was dismissed. The Court gasped. Beavis pretended to be astonished, and he glanced around with a smiling face, but his eyes were searching for detectives, and he identified two in the men who now stood by the door of the Court. They posed as ushers, but the impostor realized that their business was never to let him out of their sight until they had clapped him into a cell.

Poor Dolores was most affected by his arrest, which Beavis chose to regard as an official blunder and one which he would soon put right. The girl who loved him, however, knew that it would be a long time ere he was free again. He would have to pay the penalty for his gigantic imposture, and as she thought of the years of separation her tears flowed.

As in the case of the claim to the Peralta estate, Beavis bore himself well at the criminal trial. It was, of course, easy for the prosecution to prove his guilt, and the leading citizens who had backed him felt particularly foolish when they understood how they had been tricked. It was, perhaps, only human that Dolores should find herself without a friend when the judge sentenced her husband to a long term of imprisonment.

The society that had fawned upon and flattered her now gave her the cold shoulder. But the lonely wife did not mind. She had determined to work hard and wait patiently until the man she loved returned to her.

Some years ago when an English nobleman was sentenced to five years' penal servitude his wife took up her residence as near as possible to the gaol in which he was incarcerated. Dolores Beavis went one better. She toiled so that she might have the means to start her husband in business when he came out of gaol; and to achieve her object she underwent toil and trouble and insult.

When, later, he was removed to another gaol she would give up her employment and follow on foot, afraid to spend any of her savings on railways, and denying herself sufficient food in order that the precious "nest-egg" might not be diminished.

Beavis knew what she was doing for him, and the knowledge of it changed his nature. Money ceased to be his god. He had not appreciated Dolores when he had her all to himself, but whilst he sat in his lonely cell and remembered that she was outside the gloomy gaol working herself to the bone for him his nature softened, and he fell in love with her. Better men have inspired less devotion; fewer have known such love as Dolores bestowed upon the man to whom she had surrendered her heart.

Once Beavis, maddened by inaction, determined to escape, and he managed to communicate his intention to his wife. She implored him not to make the attempt, which would be certain to fail, and which would therefore result in an addition to his term of imprisonment. He took her advice, and a day later found that one of the party of convicts who had planned a simultaneous dash for freedom was a spy in the pay of the governor of the prison, so that there never had been the slightest chance of success.

But even the longest sentence must come to an end, and after a period of separation which had seemed like eternity to both of them Beavis walked out of the prison gates a free man. The first person he saw was Dolores, dressed simply in black and looking more beautiful than ever. Without a word they went away arm in arm to begin life anew.

Beavis had a sense of humour, and he must have realized the funny side of the scene when Dolores proudly told him that she had scraped together the large sum of forty-eight dollars ! To the man who had once refused to think of anything under a million this was a descent from the sublime to the ridiculous, yet the impostor, who had paid for his sins, could find himself regarding her fortune with enthusiasm, and he could spend hours debating as to the best way to lay it out with advantage to themselves.

It was Dolores who decided their future. She had been brought up on a ranch and away from the crowded centres, so she voted for a small farm in a remote corner of the great United States, and Beavis willingly submitted. The Peralta estate and its twenty million pounds seemed like a dream now, and he would not have troubled to devote even an hour to a similar scheme even if it promised to produce twice as much.

Thus it was his wife's love that saved James Addison Beavis from himself, and made his name unfamiliar to the police. His one great adventure in crime had met with disaster, and ever afterwards he was content with the fortune the labour of his hands earned for him.

CHAPTER XIV

JAMES GREENACRE

ACCORDING to his own description of himself, James Greenacre was a very respectable grocer, a lenient creditor, and one of the most popular residents in the parish of Camberwell; and to prove the latter statement he pointed to the fact that he had been elected one of the overseers of the parish by a substantial majority.

But the plain truth is that, during the greater part of the fifty-two years which comprised his span of life, Greenacre was a hypocritical scoundrel who preached virtue and practised vice and whose egregious vanity found an outlet in seconding the notoriety-seeking eccentricities of politicians of the Daniel Whittle Harvey type. Greenacre presided at Harvey's meetings when the latter was Radical candidate for Southwark, and there is a certain grim humour in the fact that three years after Greenacre was executed for murder his political confrère was appointed commissioner of the metropolitan police. Greenacre was prospering when an offence against the inland revenue entailed unpremeditated emigration to America, and after a brief sojourn in New York and Boston he returned to London in 1835 and began the manufacture of "an infallible remedy for throat and chest disorders." He was struggling to make this venture pay when he met Hannah Browne.

Greenacre had regained his reputation for solvency

when he astonished his numerous friends by hinting that he would not mind undergoing the ordeal of matrimony if a woman with plenty of money could be found for him. He said that, as he was a rich man, it would be only fair if the other party to the contract brought a fair fortune into the common pool. In fact, with him marriage was a business deal and nothing else, and he made no secret of his opinion.

There were plenty of girls and matrons in Camberwell who would not have objected to becoming Mrs. James Greenacre, but they all lacked the necessary qualification for the partner of the prosperous quack and politician, and their dreams of wealth soon faded. Greenacre, however, kept a sharp lookout, and one evening he casually made the acquaintance of a widow named Hannah Browne. She was between thirty-five and forty and ever since childhood had toiled laboriously. Even a short spell of married life had brought her no relief, for the late Mr. Browne had had an incurable objection to work, and his unfortunate wife had been the breadwinner for both of them. But Mrs. Browne was apparently a cheerful and free-from-care person when she was introduced to the avaricious rascal. If she was not exactly a beauty, she had features which were pleasing, and she possessed sufficient womanly tact to make the most of Greenacre's weak points. She flattered him as much as she could; dwelt on his popularity and his fearlessness as a politician—he was a stentor of the street-corner—and, doubtless, predicted that one day he would be a Member of Parliament. He swallowed the flattery, large as the doses were; but, while he liked Mrs. Browne for the sensible woman that she was, he did not forget the qualification he demanded from the person who aspired to become his wife. He had been particularly touched, however, by her references to his fame as a politician, for Greenacre was a self-styled champion of the people, and in Camberwell his voice was often raised

JAMES GREENACRE.

[illegible]

in denunciation of those eminent statesmen with whose views he did not agree. It was a time of general unrest in home affairs, and four years previously the great Reform Bill of 1832 had started the movement which eventually was to give the electors the complete control of Parliament.

Mrs. Browne resolved to marry the grocer and share his savings, and to impress Greenacre she invented a story of house property which she, a helpless widow, found difficult to manage. She told him she had been left some houses by Mr. Browne and that these with her savings made her fairly well off. Greenacre succumbed to the temptation; proposed and was accepted.

It was now late autumn, Christmas was approaching, and Hannah Browne complained of feeling lonely. Her only relative, a brother, who lived near Tottenham Court Road, had his own interests, and she was without a real friend. The widow's object was to get the marriage ceremony over as quickly as possible, for every day's delay increased the danger of Greenacre's discovery of her lies. She was confident that once she was his wife she would be all right. He might be angry; perhaps threaten her; but his standing in Camberwell would compel him to accept her as his wife and give her the shelter of his house, and she and Time would do the rest. Anyhow, the risk was small compared with the benefits to be gained by a successful issue to her plot. She had had enough of hard work, poverty and loneliness. So all through the courtship she lied and lied, and the mercenary rogue believed her because he wanted those houses and meant to have them at any price.

Urged by him Hannah Browne named a day for the wedding—the last Wednesday of the year, 1836—and to celebrate her decision Greenacre invited her to dine with him on Christmas Eve at his own house. He promised her that his housekeeper, Sarah Gale, would prepare a meal which would do credit to the occasion, and Hannah

gladly accepted, delighted as she was at the success of her scheme to secure a well-to-do husband.

What would her brother and his family say now? She glowed with gratification when she pictured their amazement when she told them that she was the wife of a prosperous trader and property-owner! The years of humiliation would be wiped out by her second marriage. Her first had been a failure, but the second would more than compensate for it.

In the early part of the day before Christmas she met several acquaintances, in whom she confided her secret, bubbling over with pride as she told it. They congratulated her and passed on, probably not giving the subject another thought. Hannah Browne had always been ambitious, and her tale of a rich husband was received with disbelief. Nevertheless, those casual meetings on Christmas Eve proved of more than ordinary interest some three months later. She had already intimated to her brother that James Greenacre was to be her husband, and the grocer had met his future brother-in-law once. Greenacre, however, was in a far better position than Gay, and did not trouble to cultivate his acquaintance. On his part, Gay was only too pleased to learn that some one was willing to take his sister off his hands, and he felt indebted to Greenacre and did not resent his indifference to him after their first meeting.

But something very important happened between the fixing of the date of the ceremony and the dinner at Carpenter's Buildings, Camberwell, and that was the discovery by Greenacre that Hannah Browne was actually penniless. It came to him with all the force of a knock-down blow, and he perspired as he thought how near he had been to entering into a contract to provide another man's daughter with board and lodging for life. He trembled as he estimated how much that would have cost him; but when his surprise and nervousness went a

fierce hatred of the deceiver took possession of his small and mean soul.

Hannah Browne had lied to him. She was penniless; indeed, she had been compelled to borrow small sums of money from casual acquaintances on the security of her forthcoming marriage to him. The respectable grocer and popular overseer went black with rage. His housekeeper, who had contemplated the marriage with dismay because it was certain that it would lead to the disinheritance of her child, of whom her employer was the father, fed his anger with the fuel of innuendo and jeers. She blackened Hannah's character, declared that the widow would make him the laughing-stock of Camberwell, and, if he declined to marry her, would most likely either try blackmail or sue him for damages.

The ambitious street-corner politician winced at the prospect of the public ridicule her disclosures would earn for him; the greedy grocer shrank from having to pay out real red gold for breach of promise.

"She's coming to dinner to-night," whispered Sarah Gale, the tight mouth and the small glittering eyes telling their own story of insensate hatred of the woman who had been selected to supplant her.

Greenacre looked into the face of his temptress, and instantly realized that if he wanted an accomplice in any crime here was one whom he could trust, even with his life.

"I don't want to see her," he said, turning away from the woman. "When she calls send her away. She'll guess by that that I've found everything out."

"She will not go away quietly," said Sarah Gale. "And if I give her a message like that she'll force her way in. What'll the neighbours say if they find a woman screaming outside your house on Christmas Eve? Better let her in. You can give her a good talking to. She deserves something for them lies she's been telling you."

He would have laughed to scorn the suggestion that he was a criminal, if the accusation had been made at that moment. Perhaps, he had been guilty in the past of giving short weight to his customers, and now and then in his anxiety to strike a bargain he may not have dealt fairly with his friends, but these were venial sins, and he believed himself to be a thoroughly respectable citizen; yet greed of gold was going to turn him into a calculating and cold-blooded criminal that very night.

When Hannah Browne arrived wearing her best clothes she was admitted by Sarah Gale, who must have smiled grimly when she saw the visitor's pleased expression.

The table was already prepared, and nothing remained but to serve up the banquet. But Greenacre, who had intended not to speak until after dinner, was unable to restrain himself, and Hannah had not been two minutes in the room when he burst into a torrent of angry words.

The widow started to her feet, listened for a few moments in silence, and then laughed mockingly. Now that the truth was known she only jeered at him, boasting of her success in having thrown dust in his eyes for so long. She answered him with threat for threat, and swore that she would make him keep his promise to marry her. Greenacre was provoked to madness, and, losing control of himself, he picked up a rolling-pin, and in a fury struck her with it. As she dropped to the floor Sarah Gale stole into the room on tiptoe, and, coming to the murderer's side, stood looking down at the corpse, elated by the knowledge that Greenacre would never be able to get rid of her now; in fact would be in her power all his life. He could not speak or move. The blood on the floor hypnotized him. He was a murderer, and if he were caught he would be hanged by the neck until he was dead. He shuddered convulsively at the thought.

The woman touched him on the shoulder.

"Why should anyone know?" she said, in a whisper

that sounded like a croak. "Let us get rid of the body. Hannah had no real friends. There'll be no one to make awkward inquiries."

Her voice roused him and he pulled himself together. The fear of the hangman was the greatest terror of all, and now dread of the consequences transformed him into a cunning, calculating villain.

With the help of Sarah Gale he divided the body into three parts—head, trunk and legs. Each meant a separate journey to a different part of London, for he believed that if he hid the remains in three places far apart from each other discovery and identification would be impossible. One or possibly two of the ghastly parcels might be unearthed, but it was out of the question that all three would be found and put together. For several hours the guilty couple laboured to remove all traces of the crime, and Christmas Day dawned with the parcels ready for disposal.

Wrapping the head in a silk handkerchief, he journeyed by omnibus into the city; from there he went to Stepney, and, reaching the Regent's Canal, he took a walk along the bank until he came to a more than usually deserted spot. Here he flung the head into the water, taking care to retain the silk handkerchief, for even in the hour of danger and stress he could remember that it had cost him several shillings.

No murderer ever spent a more ghastly Christmas than James Greenacre did, but he was by now quite callous. The second journey enabled him to dispose of the legs by flinging them into a ditch in Coldharbour Lane, not very far from his house. The disposal of the trunk, however, was the most difficult of all. It made a very heavy parcel, and Greenacre, with extraordinary daring, did not pack it in a box and attempt to get rid of it that way. He wrapped it up in cloth and paper, and, carrying it himself into the street, found a passing carter, who gave him a lift until he

was a couple of miles from Camberwell. Then the murderer took a cab, and, after two or three incidents which would have unnerved most men, he reached a lonely spot in Kilburn which he considered would make an ideal hiding-place.

The threefold task completed he returned home quite satisfied with himself. If the worst happened and the three parcels were found, the finder of the trunk at Kilburn would never dream of inquiring at Stepney for the head, or at Camberwell for the legs. He argued that the public would make three mysteries out of the three parts and never think of associating all with one crime.

Greenacre began the new year with a feeling of relief and security. His mistress, Sarah Gale, instead of being able to hold a threat over him, found herself compelled to keep silent for her own sake as well as his. She was his accomplice, and, therefore, equally guilty in the eyes of the law. Thus she had the best of reasons for forgetting the Christmas Eve tragedy, and the respectable grocer, quite unperturbed, went to reside in another London suburb and continued to deal out his "amalgamated candy" to the credulous and eloquently describe its healing qualities.

Despite his first mistake, however, Greenacre had not abandoned the idea of marriage, and he speculated in an advertisement in the "Times," taking precautions to disguise his real intentions. He advertised to the effect that he required a partner with at least three hundred pounds to help him to place on the market a new washing-machine, of which he was the sole inventor. Of course it was a lie. Greenacre wished to get into correspondence with a woman of means, and, in his opinion, this was the surest way, for any female who answered his advertisement would possess at least three hundred pounds, and the chances were that the majority of correspondents would make a more detailed reference to the means they possessed.

A lady with considerable savings did reply to the advertisement, and Greenacre promptly changed his letters from business communications into ardent protestations of respect and admiration. Encouraged by the lady's failure to resent the freedom of his language, he boldly asked her to marry him, but, fortunately for herself, she promptly rejected his offer.

But, meanwhile, something had occurred elsewhere which was to have a fatal result for the murderer. On December 28th, 1836, the trunk of Hannah Browne's body had been found at Kilburn. There was nothing to identify it, and it was ordered to be preserved for a certain time in case anyone with a missing friend or relation should come forward and recognize it. The only clue—and that a very tiny one—was that the remains were wrapped in a blue cotton frock, which had evidently been worn by a child.

Ten days afterwards a lock-keeper on the Regent's Canal pulled the head of a woman out of the water. A preliminary examination showed that it bore bruises which must have been inflicted before death. The most important discovery, however, was that the head had been roughly sawn from the body. Now, the trunk found at Kilburn bore similar traces of sawing, and that drew the attention of the Stepney police to the coincidence. They took the head to Kilburn, and there it was seen that it fitted the trunk exactly. It was now possible to have the body identified, but, although scores of persons came and viewed the legless corpse, it remained unnamed.

Two months were to pass before the body was to be completed. A basket-maker was cutting osiers in Coldharbour Lane when he saw a parcel floating in the ditch at his feet. He recovered it and examined the contents—two legs. These he conveyed to the police, who immediately placed them in the mortuary where the rest of Mrs. Browne's remains were.

In this way Greenacre's plans were confounded. He had staked everything against the possibility of the three parts ever finding their way into the same room, but within three months of the crime the complete body lay awaiting identification.

The police were not a highly-organized force in the year that witnessed the death of William IV and the accession of Queen Victoria. Out-of-date methods prevailed, and the most celebrated of the detectives were now old men, the remnants of a system that was soon to be swept away. But the treble discovery aroused the authorities. The mangled remains of the poor woman were proof positive that there was a dangerous beast at large in London, and the police concentrated their efforts on the task of finding someone who could identify the corpse, certain that once the woman's name was known the arrest of her murderer would follow speedily.

However, the days went, and failure seemed certain when Gay, Hannah Browne's brother, called to view the body. He had not seen his sister for over three months, and he was getting anxious about her. At first sight of the corpse he declared that it was his sister's and that when he had last seen her she was going to dine with James Greenacre on Christmas Eve.

"Did she keep that appointment?" asked the officer in charge of the case.

"No, she didn't," answered Gay. "At least, Mr. Greenacre came to me late on Christmas Eve and said that Hannah had not turned up. He explained that she probably had been afraid to call and dine with him because he had found her out in some lies."

"Then this Mr. Greenacre will be unable to help us to trace her movements last Christmas Eve?" said the detective.

"I suppose so," said the brother of the murdered woman. "He and Hannah quarrelled. He thought

she had a lot of money, and when he learnt that she was penniless he told her he'd never see her again."

Gay's conduct hitherto had not been creditable. He had accepted with complacence Greenacre's account of his quarrel with his sister and had not troubled to confirm it by a little independent investigation, and his feeble excuse was that he was afraid that if he took too much interest in Hannah she would insist on his keeping her, and, as he found it difficult to provide for his own and his family's wants, he did not wish to be saddled with additional expense.

The detectives now turned their attention to James Greenacre, and several interesting facts instantly came to light. The people next door said that they had been disturbed on Christmas Eve by the sound of a scuffle in Greenacre's house, and the latter's unexpected removal had caused some talk. Then the tenants who had taken his old house had commented on the smell of brimstone when first looking over it. In their opinion it had been thoroughly fumigated, and this was confirmed by a woman who had seen Mrs. Gale giving the house a most drastic cleaning a few days after Christmas, an unusual devotion to work which had excited remarks.

There was no hurry on the part of the detectives to arrest Greenacre. They believed that he did not know that suspicion had fastened on him. His demeanour was one of unruffled confidence, and the semi-public life he led favoured those whose duty it was to shadow him and rendered it easy for them to carry out their instructions. But Greenacre was fully aware of their designs on his liberty, and with considerable cleverness he nearly succeeded in outwitting them, for the unruffled grocer by day spent his nights preparing for flight, and he was arrested only a few hours before he was on the point of leaving England for America. He had booked his passage, and already some of his luggage

was on board the ship, but it was quickly recovered by the police, and a thorough examination was made of his property.

The investigation produced a plentiful crop of clues. Several incriminating articles were found, the principal one being the missing part of the blue cotton frock which had been used to cover the trunk of Hannah Browne's body. In addition to this and other unmistakable evidence, his sudden resolve to leave the country told against him. He was not the man to realize property at a heavy loss and decamp to America without a very strong reason. It was proved that when he had heard of the identification of the body of his victim he had hastily sold his property and his business, binding the purchasers to secrecy so that he might get away unobserved.

Greenacre did not waste time in denying that he was with Hannah Browne on the night she died. He knew that the evidence against him was very strong, and he thought it wiser to concoct a story of an accidental death, due to horseplay—an explanation, which was, of course, instantly rejected. Then he offered another version, which made the woman's death the result of an accidental blow by himself which was never meant to be fatal. This admission gradually led up to the truth, and then the whole story, as told here, was disclosed.

The most remarkable feature of Greenacre's conduct after his arrest was his concern for the woman who had been his mistress as well as his housekeeper. She was the mother of his four-year-old son, but, hitherto, Greenacre had treated neither with especial kindness, and it was her arrest which developed his latent love for her. When he was informed that she, too, had been taken into custody and would be placed in the dock with him to answer the capital charge, he swore that she was entirely innocent. When he was disbelieved

he raved and carried on like a madman, expressing his willingness to take all the blame for the crime if the woman was set free ; but the authorities were adamant. On no consideration would they agree to release Sarah Gale ; the woman was held a prisoner ; and when she and Greenacre met again they stood side by side in the dock.

The trial was one-sided, Greenacre's statement concerning the death of Hannah Browne constituting, in reality, a confession. The defence, such as it was, struggled feebly to win the sympathies of the jury. The male prisoner's alleged respectability was dwelt upon by his counsel, who endeavoured to prove that a man of his character and disposition could not have been guilty of such a horrible crime. As Greenacre, however, had admitted that he had dissected and disposed of the body this plea was rejected, for only the most hardened of criminals could have cut a human body up and carted it in sections about London. In the circumstances, he never had a chance of escaping, and the verdict of the jury was everybody's opinion, including that of the presiding judges, Tindal, Coleridge and Coltman.

The woman was found guilty of murder, too, but the law was satisfied with the execution of the actual murderer, and Sarah Gale's punishment was transportation beyond the seas for life. Undoubtedly she took a very prominent part in the crime, and but for her readiness to aid and abet Greenacre the latter would not have murdered the woman who had tried to trick him into marriage and paid for her failure with her life.

James Greenacre was executed publicly on May 2nd, 1837, and a contemporary account of the scene makes it difficult to believe that thirty-one years were to pass before such a spectacle became impossible.

"The Old Bailey and every spot which could

command a view of the spot were crowded to excess," wrote an anonymous journalist. "From the hour of twelve on Monday night up to the moment the execution took place, the Old Bailey presented one living mass of human beings. Every house which commanded a view of the spot was filled by well-dressed men and women, who paid from five shillings to ten shillings for a seat. A great number of gentlemen were admitted within the walls of Newgate, by orders of the sheriffs, anxious to witness the last moments of the convict. During the whole of Monday night the area in front of Newgate was a crowded scene of bustle and confusion, and the public-houses and the coffee-shops were never closed. The local officers connected with the watch had plenty of business on their hands in consequence of the thefts that were committed, and the broils and pugilistic encounters of many a nocturnal adventurer. Divers windows were broken and many heads felt the force of a constable's truncheon. The language of the vast multitude was vile in the highest degree, and songs of a libidinous nature were chanted. At one period of the night the mob bid open defiance to the whole posse of watchmen and constables, and not only rescued thieves, but broke the watch-house windows. Vehicles of every description drove up in quick succession. The passengers, seemingly having their curiosity gratified by the gloomy aspect of the walls, retired to make way for another train. Occasionally a carriage full of gentlemen, and, we believe, in some instances accompanied by ladies, mingled for a moment amidst the eager crowd. . . . All who had procured places in the windows commanding a view of the place of execution made sure of their seats by occupying them several hours before the dismal preparations commenced. There was not at any time of the night less than two thousand persons in the street. Several persons remained all night clinging to the lamp-posts.

The occupier of any house that had still a seat undisposed of informed the public of the vacancy by announcing the fact on large placards posted on the walls, and forthwith the rush of competitors was greater than on any former occasion."

Inside the gaol the condemned man was being exhibited to the curiosity-mongers who had sufficient influence with the sheriffs to obtain the right to inspect and torment the convict, and an hour before his death Greenacre was cross-examined by an amateur theologian and caused "great grief" to the company by hinting that Christ was not divine.

The contemporary report continues:

"The culprit having been pinioned, Mr. Cope handed him over, with the death-warrant, to the sheriffs to see execution done upon him. About five minutes before eight the procession was formed and began to move towards the gallows. . . On his appearance outside he was greeted with a storm of terrific yells and hisses, mingled with groans, cheers and other expressions of reproach, revenge, hatred and contumely. . . As the body hung quivering in mortal agonies, the eyes of the assembled thousands were riveted upon the swaying corpse with a kind of satisfaction, and all seemed pleased with the removal of such a blood-stained murderer from the land."

In the condemned cell Greenacre wrote a euphemistic autobiography and "An Essay on the Human Mind"—both these productions were added to the archives at Newgate—and between outbursts of piety and blasphemy he boasted of his popularity with the fair sex—he said he had been married four times—and seemed to be concerned for the future of Sarah Gale. She survived him by fifty-one years, eventually dying in 1888 in Australia, a venerable, white-haired matron who had outlived her sins.

CHAPTER XV

CATHERINE WILSON

AMONGST female poisoners Catherine Wilson takes a leading place. She had an active career as a professional murderess extending to ten years, perhaps even longer than that, but we do know that she committed murder in 1853, and she was not brought to justice and executed until 1862. A very long career, indeed, for a woman whose ignorance was only equalled by her cunning, and whose gaunt and unfavourable exterior was in keeping with a black heart and a diseased brain.

The first time the public heard the name of this poisoner was in the month of April, 1862, when she stood in the dock in Marylebone Police Court, and was charged with having attempted to murder a Mrs. Connell by administering poison to her.

Mrs. Connell had been living apart from her husband, and, having found a lonely and companionless life irksome to her, she began to long for a reconciliation with the man who had wooed and won her not so many years previously. Of course, to effect this it was necessary to find a sympathetic woman who would be able to approach Mr. Connell and delicately and tactfully sound him as to his views regarding a reunion with his wife. For some unexplained reason Mrs. Connell asked Catherine Wilson to act as intermediary, and to prepare her for the task Mrs. Connell invited the widow to have tea with her. She opened her heart to her guest, did

not conceal the fact that she had a little money of her own, and volunteered other information, while the hard-faced creature with the eyes of a tigress sat opposite and planned her death.

The conversation was abruptly ended by a cry of pain from Mrs. Connell. She had not noticed that although Mrs. Wilson was only a guest she had poured out the last cup of tea for her, and she thought that her illness was the result of worry and overstrain.

Of course Mrs. Wilson instantly became sympathetically attentive. The hard eyes even moistened as she helped Mrs. Connell upstairs and laid her gently and tenderly on her bed. Then she ran off to the nearest chemist's shop and brought back a bottle of medicine, but when Mrs. Connell took some of it her sufferings became intensified. Catherine Wilson soothingly offered some more of the "medicine" she had brought from the chemist's, and Mrs. Connell, writhing in her agony, again tried to drink it, but spilt a little of it on the bed-clothes. The "medicine" was so strong that it actually burnt holes in the linen!

Mrs. Connell did not die, though she suffered a great deal, and at one time nearly succumbed.

The matter was too serious to be allowed to rest, and, as she had been told by Mrs. Wilson that it was the chemist's fault for giving her such medicine, she called on him for an explanation. The chemist, astounded and angered by the charge, quickly proved that the medicine he had sold was perfectly harmless, and when the police were sent for he demonstrated conclusively that if anything noxious had been added to the contents of the bottle the only person who could have done it was the woman who had conveyed it from his shop to Mrs. Connell.

After that there was only one thing to do, and that was to arrest Catherine Wilson, who had disappeared a few days previously. Her flight was in itself almost

a confession, and for six weeks she managed to evade the detectives who were searching for her, but by chance she was recognized by an officer when he was off duty, and he took her into custody.

After several appearances at the Marylebone Police Court she was committed for trial, and, under close supervision, she calmly awaited the day of the great ordeal.

And while she is in prison we can trace her history up to the spring of 1862.

It was towards the close of the summer of 1853 that a widower of the name of Mawer advertised for a housekeeper. He lived in the pleasant town of Boston, in Lincolnshire, was prosperous, and he would have been quite happy but for gout, an enemy with which he was daily fighting, using as his principal weapon a poison—colchicum—which, taken in small doses, is often prescribed by doctors. In large quantities it is, of course, fatal.

Catherine Wilson was one of the applicants for the post, and she was successful in obtaining it. She called herself a widow, and, perhaps, there had been a husband once who may have been her first victim. Mr. Mawer, however, thought her a respectable, hardworking woman, and she certainly proved unremitting in her attentions to him.

Within a few months they were intimate friends, and the housekeeper was so assiduous and helpful that Mr. Mawer's gout became much better. He told Catherine Wilson that it was entirely due to her, and to prove his gratitude he informed her that he had drawn up a will bequeathing everything to her. It was a fatal disclosure, for had he not disclosed to her his testamentary dispositions there can be little doubt but that he would have lived much longer than he did. The poisoner began her fell work at once, tempted by the prospect of gain, and as she had the poison already

in the house there was no way of escape for the unfortunate man.

In October, 1854, he died, poisoned with colchicum, as the doctor discovered ; but, as Mr. Mawer was known to have used that poison to counteract the gout, no suspicion was attached to the "heartbroken" housekeeper.

Mr. Mawer's fortune was not as large as the woman had imagined it to be. Still, it amounted to a few hundred pounds, and the murderess, who had good reasons for not wishing to remain too long in Boston, packed up and came to London.

She did not come alone, for when she took lodgings at the house of a Mrs. Soames, at 27 Alfred Street, Bedford Square, she was accompanied by a man of the name of Dixon, whom she described as her husband. And packed away in her trunk was a large packet of colchicum, which had been left over after Mr. Mawer had been disposed of. There was enough of the poison to kill half a dozen persons. Perhaps if Mr. Dixon had been aware of that he might not have been so anxious to caress this human tigress.

But Catherine Wilson soon discovered that she had very little use for Dixon. He did not make enough money to please her, and when the last of Mr. Mawer's legacy had been spent she began to look about her for a fresh vicitm. Dixon was clearly in the way, particularly so since that Saturday night when he had returned home intoxicated and had struck her. The wretched man had no money, and Wilson had grown tired of him. Besides, their landlady, Mrs. Soames was by now Wilson's intimate friend, and she had learned that Mrs. Soames was by no means dependent on letting lodgings and that she had moneyed relatives and friends. Before she could attack Mrs. Soames it was necessary Dixon should be removed.

One day Dixon was taken ill, a curious wasting illness

accompanied by terrible pains in the chest. Wilson hastened to assure everybody she knew that her " husband " had always suffered from consumption, although, as she had to confess, outwardly he appeared to be very strong and healthy. After administering a few small doses of colchicum the monster finished off with a strong dose, and then the " widow " tearfully implored the doctor not to cut her " dear one " up because during his lifetime he had expressed a horror of that " indignity."

But the doctor would not give a death certificate without a post-mortem examination, for, Mrs. Wilson having insisted that the cause of Dixon's death was galloping consumption, the medical man was curious. His curiosity deepened when on opening the body he found the lungs absolutely perfect. Consumption then was not the reason. But what was ? The doctors were puzzled, yet in some extraordinary manner Catherine Wilson wriggled out of danger, and Dixon was buried. No one accused her, and even if the doctor had his suspicions he never gave a hint of them.

The " widow " went about in mourning, and as she was quite alone in the world now Mrs. Soames was sweeter and more sympathetic than ever, and night after night the two women sat in the cosy little room Mrs. Wilson rented, and there exchanged confidences. The poisoner had a long series of skilful lies ready to impress her friend, but Mrs. Soames, who had nothing to conceal, disclosed the story of her life, and added particulars of her friends and relations.

When she told Mrs. Wilson after breakfast one morning that she was going out to receive from her step-brother a legacy which had been left her by an aunt the poisoner once again experienced that irresistible desire to take human life. But here there seemed to be no reason why she should run the risk of committing a cold-blooded crime. By killing Mrs. Soames she

could not become possessed of her property, for the landlady had children, and she also had several male relatives who would have interfered at once had Mrs. Soames died and made a comparative stranger her sole heir.

Mrs. Soames was paid the money and returned home, where her married daughter had tea ready for her. They drank it alone, but as they were finishing Mrs. Wilson came to the door and asked the landlady to come upstairs with her. The request was complied with at once.

What happened at the interview we can only conjecture. Probably Mrs. Wilson first congratulated Mrs. Soames on the receipt of the legacy. Then she may have invited her to join her in a drink to her continued prosperity. Whatever did happen it is certain that from the time of that secret interview Mrs. Soames was never the same woman again.

The landlady could not get up next morning at her usual time. This was remarkable, because she was noted for her early rising, and she was not happy unless superintending the work of her house. Mrs. Wilson was, of course, deeply concerned for her friend, and she asked the daughter to be permitted to look after her mother.

Without waiting for permission the depraved creature appointed herself the only nurse, and she would not allow anyone else to give the patient her medicines. All the special food, too, passed through her hands, and when compelled by sheer exhaustion to take a little rest Wilson did not return to her own bedroom, but snatched a couple of hours sleep in an arm-chair in Mrs. Soames's room.

On the fourth day of her illness Mrs. Soames had ceased to vomit, and was not suffering any pain. Catherine Wilson pretended to be delighted, though really she was puzzled by the marvellous recovery the land-

lady had made. By sheer luck she had managed to resist the poison her "nurse" had been giving her. Of course she did not suspect this, nor could she gather from the concerned look on Wilson's face that the truth was that the murderess of Mr. Mawer and Dixon was going to give her a large dose of colchicum that very day and kill her.

Bending over the patient, Wilson offered her another dose of medicine, and the trusting woman took it with gratitude, for she had told her "friend" that her recovery was due to her nursing. But within a few minutes the landlady was screaming in agony again, and an hour later Catherine Wilson was silently weeping by the window while the doctor, who had been summoned in haste, announced that Mrs. Soames was dead.

The same doctor had attended Dixon, and although the symptoms were similar in both cases he did not suspect Catherine Wilson of murder. Mr. Whidburn—that was his name—was studiously correct, and, as in the case of Dixon, he refused to give a medical certificate without a post-mortem examination. He made the examination himself, and then certified that death had occurred from natural causes. Mrs. Soames's nearest relation received the certificate, and the murderess was safe. She surprised the family, however, by a demand for the payment of ten pounds which she said her late landlady owed her, and when she adduced proof in the shape of a signed promise to pay by Mrs. Soames the money was handed over. Nothing was said as to anything Mrs. Wilson may have owed Mrs. Soames. Later it was known that she had borrowed a fairly large sum from the kind-hearted landlady, and it was suspected with good cause that the promissory note for ten pounds was a forgery. But these were of no importance when later the gravest of all charges was made against the poisoner.

The death of Mrs. Soames resulted in another change

of address for Catherine Wilson, and she went some distance away from Bedford Square, engaging rooms in Loughborough Road, Brixton.

The poisoner was well off, and did not stint herself, and it was assumed by her new acquaintance that the late Mr. Wilson had dowered her with sufficient goods to enable her to live independently of the world.

It may be noted here that a few weeks before the death of Mrs. Soames, Wilson had spent nearly a fortnight shopping with a friend from the North, Mrs. Atkinson. One day Mrs. Atkinson had had the misfortune to lose a purse containing fifty-one pounds. It was a terrible blow, and Mrs. Wilson was so grieved for her that she offered to lend her all the spare cash she had. The offer was refused—as Wilson had known it would be—and Mrs. Atkinson had returned home without having breathed a word against her old friend. But when Catherine Wilson came back after seeing Mrs. Atkinson off from King's Cross she was in funds, and the following day she made an extensive purchase of clothes for herself. Picking the pocket of her best friend was the smallest of sins to a woman who could take human life without a moment's hesitation.

It was the custom of Mrs. Atkinson to come to London once a year, and generally during the month of October. She and her husband lived in Kirkby Lonsdale, in Cumberland. Mr. Atkinson was a tailor, while his wife ran a millinery and dressmaking establishment on her own account. Strict attention to business and frugal living were the sources of the prosperity of the Atkinsons, and, on her annual visits to London Mrs. Atkinson never came provided with less than a hundred pounds with which to buy stock. She carried the notes concealed about her person, and, of course, her severe loss in 1859 made her more careful than ever when she came to London in the October of 1860.

Mrs. Atkinson's visit to the Metropolis was exceed-

ingly well-timed from Wilson's point of view. All the money she had obtained during the previous twelve months had vanished, and she was behind with her rent. Her new landlady, fiercely practical, was demanding payment every day, and her affairs were so bad that, beyond the paltry breakfast she extracted from the landlady, she often saw no food during a whole day. It would not have done to have disclosed the true state of affairs to her friend from the North. That might have frightened her away. She invited her to stay with her, and then she told her landlady that her prosperous friend would lend her the money to pay all her debts. In the circumstances the landlady was only too pleased to see Mrs. Atkinson in her house. Mrs. Atkinson left Kirkby Lonsdale in perfect health, and looking forward with zest to her stay in London. A keen business woman, she, nevertheless, knew how to combine business with pleasure, and, having said good-bye to her husband, she departed in excellent spirits. Mrs. Wilson met her at the terminus, and after a substantial tea—for which, of course, the visitor paid—they went by omnibus to Loughborough Road, Brixton, and, as the landlady afterwards testified, Mrs. Atkinson arrived there in the best of health, light-hearted and jolly. She must have been a sharp contrast to Catherine Wilson, whose countenance was repulsive, and whose manner was the secretive one of the poisoner.

The women went about everywhere together, Mrs. Atkinson paying all expenses. On this occasion the visitor had brought a hundred and ten pounds in notes with her, for business had been good and her customers were increasing. The hungry eyes of Catherine Wilson gleamed at the sight of the notes, and her bony fingers longed to clutch them. Every day saw the number of notes grow gradually less as Mrs. Atkinson was buying stock, and the poisoner knew that unless she hurried

there would not be enough money left to make it worth her while to add to her list of crimes.

On the fourth day Mr. Atkinson was busy in his shop at Kirkby Lonsdale when a telegram was handed to him. He read it anxiously—for telegrams were a novelty—and nearly collapsed under the blow. The message was from Loughborough Road, Brixton, London, S.W., and it said that his wife was dangerously ill. Flinging all business on one side the unhappy man hastened to London, arriving only in time to watch her die. She was unconscious when he entered the room, and passed away without a word to him.

The broken-hearted husband was stunned by the blow, and his poor wife's "friend" was prostrated. Mrs. Wilson, he was informed, had taken to her bed upon being informed of her dearest friend's death, and her grief was so intense that she was with difficulty induced to give a brief account of Mrs. Atkinson's last day on earth.

The doctor assured Mr. Atkinson that no one could be more surprised than he was at the fatal termination of Mrs. Atkinson's illness. An extensive practice had brought him into contact with death in many shapes, but there was nothing like this in all his experience. He advised a post-mortem examination to ascertain the cause of death, and the husband of the murdered woman seemed inclined to sanction that course when Catherine Wilson came forward with a pathetic story of a dying request from Mrs. Atkinson that she, her best friend, would see to it that her body was not "cut up."

In the most natural manner the poisoner told her lie, and Mr. Atkinson, to whom every word of his wife was sacred, withheld his approval, and no examination took place.

Now, Mr. Atkinson was well aware that his wife had brought a hundred and ten pounds to London with her,

and he searched for the notes amongst her effects. When he failed to discover a single one he turned to Mrs. Wilson for an explanation. Had his wife paid all the money away? It was most unlikely that she had. But he was even more astounded when Mrs. Wilson informed him that his wife had arrived in London with only her return ticket and a few shillings.

"Didn't she write and tell you what happened?" said the poisoner, who was dressed in black, and carried a pocket handkerchief with which she dabbed her eyes every other moment.

"No, I didn't get a single letter from her," said Mr. Atkinson. "I was a bit surprised, but I thought she was too busy to write."

Catherine Wilson knew this, for she had destroyed two letters which Mrs. Atkinson had written to her husband, the unfortunate woman having entrusted them to her to post. She now pretended to fathom the reason for Mrs. Atkinson's silence.

"She was so tender-hearted, Mr. Atkinson," she said, with a catch in her voice, "that she wouldn't tell you the bad news. I'm sorry to say that she was robbed of all her money at Rugby."

"Rugby!" exclaimed Mr. Atkinson, in astonishment. "What was she doing at Rugby? I don't understand you."

"She was taken ill in the train," said the woman, lying glibly, "and when it stopped at Rugby she got out. Soon afterwards she became faint again, and when she recovered she found she had been robbed. Then she came on here and told me, and I've been lending her money to get about. She was hoping the money would be recovered before she had to tell you. Oh, she was goodness itself, and I have lost my dearest and only friend."

She sank into a chair, sobbing as though her heart was breaking, and Mr. Atkinson, who had been seized

with a suspicion, engendered by a memory of the loss of the purse containing fifty-one pounds the year before, dismissed his thoughts as unfair to the woman who was mourning so whole-heartedly over the loss of the wife he loved. He did not dwell any longer on the disappearance of the notes. After all, his wife was dead, and all the money in the world could not bring her back to him.

He journeyed home again, and Catherine Wilson waited only for a week to go by before she paid her debts, added to her wardrobe, and proudly exhibited a diamond ring which she said Mr. Atkinson had given her as a small token of his gratitude for her care of his wife. It had been the property of the late Mrs. Atkinson, but the poisoner had stolen it before the body of her victim was cold.

It may well be asked how Catherine Wilson could commit so many cold-blooded murders unchecked. It seems to us that it ought to have been impossible for a healthy woman to die in agony and yet be buried without a coroner's inquest. But that is what happened sixty-one years ago, and we must be thankful that nowadays a person of the Catherine Wilson type would have an extremely brief career.

The cases described do not comprise all her crimes. There were two other persons she attacked with her poisons who happily escaped with their lives, and there was an old lady in Boston who died in such circumstances that it is practically certain Catherine Wilson poisoned her. She had been friendly with her, and her sudden death benefited Wilson to the extent of over a hundred pounds.

Such is the history of the woman who was arrested for attempting to poison Mrs. Connell. The period between committal for trial and the proceedings at the Old Bailey was a protracted one, but the prisoner maintained a sullen demeanour whilst under the care of the prison authorities.

Occasionally she protested her innocence, but she was crafty enough not to say much, and when she entered the dock at the Central Criminal Court she was still a human enigma to all who had come in contact with her.

That she appeared confident of a favourable verdict was obvious, and it had to be admitted that whilst the prosecution had plenty of surmise and suspicion they had very little legal proof. The defence relied almost entirely on the absence of motive and the fact that no one had actually seen the prisoner place the poison in Mrs. Connell's medicine. There were a great many suspicious circumstances which the prosecution rightly demanded an explanation of, but the prisoner's counsel pointed out that his client must be assumed to be innocent until her guilt was proved. It was no part of his duty to incriminate her or assist the prosecution. The judge summed up in a way which indicated that in his opinion the prosecution had not established beyond all doubt the guilt of the prisoner, and the jury, realizing that if they made a mistake and sent an innocent woman to the gallows they could not undo it, decided to be on the safe side. They, therefore, returned a verdict of "Not Guilty," and Catherine Wilson, poisoner, forger and thief, left the dock with a smile on her hard face and a glint of triumph in her eyes.

How she must have laughed in secret at her victory! What fools she must have thought the twelve good men and true were! Her character was vindicated, and she was safe. She was to suffer a severe shock, however.

A few days later an amiable-looking man stopped her just as she was leaving her lodgings.

"Excuse me," he said politely, one hand in his pocket wherein lay an important legal document, "but are you Mrs. Catherine Wilson?"

"Yes," said the poisoner, who feared no one after

her Old Bailey triumph. "What do you want with me?"

"I am a police officer," he answered, producing the paper, "and I must ask you to accompany me to the station. I have a warrant for your arrest on a charge of murder."

"Murder?" she gasped, terrified for a moment. Then she laughed. "Whose murder?" She might well ask that question seeing that there were several with which she could have been charged.

"That of Mrs. Soames, of 27 Alfred Street, Bedford Square," he answered, glancing at the warrant.

The police had not been idle during that long remand following the mysterious poisoning of Mrs. Connell. They had delved completely into Catherine Wilson's past, and when they had compiled a list of her crimes the authorities decided that they would arrest her again and charge her with Mrs. Soames's death. They could have added others, but, knowing with whom they were dealing, they thought it better to keep the cases of Mr. Mawer and Mrs. Atkinson in reserve. Should her first trial for murder result in acquittal they would charge her with having caused the death of Mrs. Atkinson, and so on, until they had removed this danger to society.

But the prosecution made no mistake this time, and Catherine Wilson was in the coils from the moment she listened to the outline of the case against her at the Police Court.

Further facts were brought forward at the Old Bailey, and so skilfully did the authorities present their case that when the jury returned their verdict of guilty, and Mr. Justice Byles was passing sentence, he could say: "The result upon my mind is that I have no more doubt that you committed the crime than if I had seen it committed with my own eyes."

With a smile of contempt the poisoner left the dock

and when she was led forth to die in public, and twenty thousand persons watched her last moments, she presented the same cool, sneering manner, absolutely indifferent to her fate, quite unafraid of death, and without a word of sorrow or repentance for her terrible crimes.

CHAPTER XVI

PIERRE VOIRBO

THE case of Pierre Voirbo, the murderer of Désiré Bodasse, an old man who had been his friend, is one of the most remarkable of French crimes. It established the reputation of Macé, the famous detective, who devoted a book to explaining how he succeeded in tracing the murderer from the first clue—a pair of human legs—to the last, when, by a simple experiment, he located the very spot where the murder had been committed. If Macé had not been an exceedingly clever man Voirbo must have escaped, for he took every precaution to cover up his tracks, and was undoubtedly assisted by luck. But the strong arm of the law triumphed in the end.

Voirbo was by trade a tailor, and by inclination a devotee of pleasure. He worked when he felt inclined, and if he could borrow or steal he preferred either as a source of income to the small profits derived from the making and repairing of clothes. He frequented low-class cafés, and gambled whenever he could, and, in addition, he had a pretty taste in wines. Yet for all his laziness and dissipation it was often remarked that Pierre Voirbo seemed never to be without money. He neglected his work until customers became few and far between, but he was never behindhand with his rent, and he could afford to employ an old woman to keep his rooms tidy.

The time came, however, when Voirbo thought of

marriage. The hero of many conquests, he had not really been attracted by the opposite sex until he met a good-looking girl with a dowry of fifteen thousand francs. Then he found the good looks and the dowry irresistible attractions. He considered himself not wanting in appearance and ability, though he was actually below the medium height, had black hair and eyes, and a thin, cruel mouth. Eyes and mouth bore witness to his dissipation, but the girl evidently was blinded by love, for she agreed to marry Voirbo. When her parents were told they gave their consent on the condition that the bridegroom-to-be brought into the marriage settlements at least ten thousand francs. Voirbo instantly expressed his ability to provide that amount, and he was thereupon formally acknowledged to be the girl's fiancé by her parents, who did not know that, so far from being in possession of ten thousand francs, the tailor owed many thousands already, and had not a hundred francs to call his own. Voirbo, however, believed that he would be able to raise the money. Penury had sharpened his wits and endowed him with self-confidence.

A vague idea now occurred to him of borrowing the money, exhibiting it to the girl's parents, and then returning it when he got his hands on his wife's *dot*. It was a pretty scheme, but its weak point was that, owing to his reputation, there was no one in the country who would lend him a franc, and after a little consideration he abandoned the scheme.

But he was determined to have the girl's marriage *dot* no matter what the cost. Fifteen thousand francs meant a fortune to him. It would last a long time, and when it was gone it would be quite easy to desert his bride, and seek another elsewhere. It was, indeed, a pretty plan he conceived, though he knew that the first obstacle—raising that sum of ten thousand francs —would prove the most difficult of all.

Amongst his friends was an old man, Désiré Bodasse, a worker in tapestry, who had been Voirbo's companion in more than one midnight spree. Bodasse, however, had never opened his purse to pay. It was Voirbo who always paid for their food and drink, the spindle-legged little man, with the dry cough, chuckling to himself as he saw the young fool throw his money away. Bodasse boasted that for every franc he spent he saved three, and he naturally despised anyone who spent his money on others. Voirbo, however, had taken a fancy to Bodasse, and was very often seen in his society, while everybody marvelled at the strange partnership between two men who were so dissimilar.

It was to Désiré Bodasse that Voirbo went with the story that he must raise ten thousand francs at once. The younger man painted a glowing picture of the wealth of his future wife exaggerating her fifteen thousand francs until it became a *dot* four times as great. Bodasse listened with a thin smile on his thinner face, and when Voirbo's outburst was over congratulated him sarcastically.

The tailor ignored the sarcasm, and, after a pause, boldly asked Bodasse to lend him ten thousand francs. He knew that the old fellow had that sum and more in the box under his bed, for Bodasse had been saving for years, and was a rich man, and, Voirbo argued, the time had come when Bodasse could show that he was not ungrateful for the entertainment he had enjoyed for years at his expense.

The worker in tapestry, however, was not the man to part with his money. It was all he lived for; it was all he thought about; and in a few curt words he gave Voirbo to understand that if his marriage depended on the success of his application he had better forget all about it at once. In short, he would not lend him ten francs, much less ten thousand.

There was no one else to whom he could apply, and

Bodasse's refusal filled Voirbo with dismay, but he had to pretend to be indifferent after the first shock of disappointment was over, and an hour later both men appeared to have forgotten the incident when they sat in a café and drank wine to one another's health. But Voirbo's brain was on fire. He had regarded the capture of the girl's fifteen thousand francs as a certainty, and he could not bear to admit to himself that he was going to lose her fortune after all. Where could he raise ten thousand francs ? Besides his ostensible occupation of tailor he was one of the numerous agents of the Paris secret police. He had used his official position in the past to blackmail inoffensive citizens, but he knew that it would take him more than a year to raise ten thousand francs by that method.

Bodasse, unconscious of his companion's thoughts, continued to drink at Voirbo's expense, while the latter was rapidly summing up to himself the risks he would have to run if he murdered the man sitting opposite him. He knew all about Bodasse's life—the fellow's miserly habits ; his lack of friends because he had been afraid that if he made many they might cost him money ; his unpopularity in the neighbourhood in which he lived, and the well-known fact that his greatest wish was to be left alone. Voirbo recalled, too, that Bodasse was in the habit of disappearing from human sight for weeks at a time, when he either shut himself up in his room or went into the country. In the former case he was wont to provide himself with sufficient food to last out his spell of seclusion, and if letters came they were pushed under his door so that he might not be disturbed by having to open it. With murder in his heart, Voirbo thought over this, and came to the only possible conclusion—the murder of Désiré Bodasse would be about the easiest crime to commit and the chances of escape would favour him.

The bottle of wine finished, Voirbo suggested an

adjournment to his rooms, where he had often provided Bodasse with food. The old miser agreed with alacrity, and shortly afterwards they were in an apartment at the top of a high house. From outside the murmur of traffic faintly reached their ears, and from the stairs came occasional voices, but, for all that, the two men were quite alone, and Bodasse was absolutely at the mercy of the younger and stronger man.

The temptation was irresistible. Voirbo looked at the small body and wizened face, the thin, scraggy neck and the lustreless eyes. Life seemed to be halfway out of his body already, and it would be easy to let the other half out too. Bodasse was sitting with his back towards Voirbo, who had risen and was walking irresolutely about the room.

Suddenly the fellow found the courage to put his thoughts into acts. A heavy flat-iron, such as tailors use, was lying handy. He picked it up, poised it for a moment, and then brought it down upon the old man's head with a fearful crash, which sent him in a heap on the floor. There he finished him by cutting his throat. The first act in the drama was accomplished.

Until the murder was done Voirbo had not thought of locking the door, but now he ran to it and turned the key. There were at least a dozen persons in the building at the time, for it was let out in apartments, but Voirbo, with extraordinary self-possession, proceeded to make arrangements for disposing of the body. He could not carry it out as it was, and, therefore, like many other murderers, he decided to divide it into several pieces. The head is, of course, the most important part of the body, because it is the easiest to identify. Get rid of the head and identification is rendered a hundred times more difficult. Voirbo gave it his special attention, and he disposed of it by filling the eyes and mouth with lead and dropping it into the Seine. The rest of the body was carted away in pieces,

but on his second journey he had a very narrow escape, and disaster would have resulted early on had he not formed his plans with the utmost thoroughness. He undoubtedly proved himself efficient in small matters as well as in large, as his unexpected meeting with the police showed.

With a hamper and a large parcel, both containing portions of the murdered man's body, he left the house one dark December night, with the intention of pitching them into the Seine at a spot where there would be no one to notice him. The hamper and the parcel were heavy, cumbrous and conspicuous, but Voirbo knew that on such a night there would be few pedestrians, and any who noticed him would think that he had been doing his Christmas shopping, and was taking the Christmas dinner and some presents home to his family. Owing to the weight of his double burden progress was slow, but Voirbo was not nervous. Nobody gave him a second glance, and he had the satisfaction of meeting more than one late shopper carrying big parcels too.

But just as he was congratulating himself on complete success he was horrified to see two policemen coming straight towards him. His legs trembled, and for a moment he thought of dropping hamper and parcel and taking to flight, but before he could make up his mind the two officers of the law had stopped in front of him, and one was actually resting a hand on the hamper.

"Who are you, and what's inside your parcels?" said one of the policemen suspiciously.

There had been numerous robberies in the district lately, and the police had recieved special instructions to keep a sharp look out for midnight marauders. In fact, these two officers were looking for a burglar or a street robber. They never thought of aiming as high as a murderer.

With difficulty Voirbo found his voice.

"I—I couldn't get a cab at the station, messieurs," he said, with a smile, "and so I've been compelled to carry home my purchases. This parcel contains two hams. You can feel how heavy it is! The hamper—see the label. It arrived for me by train."

The officers examined the label on the hamper. It apparently had been addressed at a distant suburb and consigned to Paris. The label certainly looked genuine enough, and the explanation of hams in the parcel accounted for its unusual weight.

The policemen consulted in whispers. They had been impressed by Voirbo's frankness, and eventually they permitted him to pass on. Had they examined the contents of either hamper or parcel they would have been able to arrest there and then as cruel a murderer as France has ever known. It was characteristic of Voirbo's cleverness that he should have labelled the hamper before emerging into the open with it.

Gradually he got rid of the rest of the body, the last expedition being to the well of an apartment house close by, where he left the legs of his victim.

As an agent of the secret police Voirbo was conversant with police methods, and also had access to their offices. He knew that he would be one of the first to hear if the authorities had been advised of either Bodasse's disappearance or the discovery of any portion of his body. For some days after the crime he frequented the police offices, and what he saw there convinced him that he could never be brought to account for his crime. Discovery was impossible, and he was quite safe.

But so thorough was he in his methods that he did not stop at disposing of the body and robbing his victim. It was necessary to make the people in the house where Bodasse had lived believe that the old tapestry worker was still alive, though invisible behind the locked door. Accordingly, Voirbo, having filled his pockets with

Bodasse's savings—they amounted to about thirty thousand francs, mainly in the form of Italian bonds payable to bearer—proceeded to impersonate his victim.

For days and nights after Bodasse was murdered the woman who lived in the room underneath heard footsteps over her and, well aware that Désiré Bodasse never received visitors, told her friends that the old man, though he had not been seen for some days, was hiding in his room as usual. Whenever letters came for him they were pushed under the door, and, of course, opened and read by Voirbo. The murderer, however, would not remain in the room all night, and when darkness fell he left, having first placed a lighted candle near the window so that anyone who looked up would say that Bodasse was at home. Each candle burned for three hours before spluttering feebly out.

Every night for a fortnight the lighted candle was seen and commented on, and, furthermore, the shadow of a man's head was occasionally seen across the blind. The neighbours gossipped about him, telling one another that Monsieur Bodasse was at home. No one expected to see him in the flesh for weeks, for it was understood that he had given way to one of his fits of solitude and would resent a call.

Voirbo, confident, triumphant, careless, and revelling in his own cleverness, went to his prospective father-in-law and told him that he was now ready to produce the ten thousand francs which he required as evidence of his position. This promise he carried out, and, the girl's *dot* being brought into the common fund, the marriage was fixed to take place a few days later.

"My rich friend, Père Bodasse, will attend me," he said proudly to the family into which he was marrying. He spoke, of course, after the murder of the old man. "He is a bit of a miser, but I expect a handsome present from him."

They little knew he had already murdered and robbed Bodasse.

The family, impressed by Voirbo's fortune, expressed themselves as most anxious to make the acquaintance of Monsieur Bodasse, and they were looking forward to that honour when, on the day of the wedding, Voirbo told them that Bodasse had meanly run off to the country to avoid buying him a wedding present.

"He will not get himself a new coat, the old miser!" he added in angry contempt. "And that is why he is not here. He knows his clothes are too shabby. I have spent much money on him in the past, but never again."

It was, however, a small incident, and in no way spoilt the happiness of all concerned. There was a banquet at an hotel, and afterwards the married couple left for a short honeymoon. They were not to return to Voirbo's apartments, for he had given them up and had taken a house elsewhere.

With his wife's fortune he had now over forty thousand francs and the newly married couple set up housekeeping on an ambitious scale, because Voirbo declared that he could earn quite a large income from his trade, so, when the honeymoon finished, realizing that it would be risky to parade his prosperity, he settled down to work. He had taken measures to conceal the stolen property, and, secure and confident, he lived from day to day, expecting that in time Bodasse's disappearance would lead to an inquiry, but utterly fearless of the consequences to himself. And all the time his young and pretty girl-wife never suspected that there was anything wrong.

The third week of that new year—1870—was drawing to a close when Voirbo heard that the legs he had thrown into the well belonging to the restaurant in the Rue Princesse had been found. He received the news calmly, and offered no comment until he was told that Macé,

then in charge of the police department of the quarter where the remains had been discovered, was commissioned to unravel the mystery. Now Voirbo knew Macé, and had never had a good opinion of his ability.

"He'll never solve it," he said, with a laugh that reflected his own satisfaction.

He felt that he was lucky not to have one of the leading detectives on the case. He feared the proved, tried men who had unravelled the dark mysteries of the past. But as for Macé, well, he was young and inexperienced, and Voirbo was prepared to make him a present not only of the legs, but of the rest of the body, if it could be found. Nevertheless, curiosity, mingled with some anxiety, induced Voirbo to pay a visit to Macé's office. He was, of course, able to stroll in whenever he liked, because he was in the police service himself, and, naturally, his interest in the mystery of the Rue Princesse excited no suspicion. There was nothing remarkable about his inquiries. All Paris was roused by the discovery of the legs, and Voirbo was as anxious as anyone to hear the latest news.

On the occasion of his first visit he was told the result of the medical examination, and how he must have grinned in secret when he was informed that two doctors, experts in the art of identifying human remains, had given it as their opinion that the legs belonged to a woman. Their thinness, the size of the feet, and the fact that they were clothed in stockings, gave rise to this mistake, which caused the police to spend a long time looking for the body of a woman.

The one clue they had was the letter "B" marked between two crosses. That was all the detectives had to go upon, and for days the police inquired if anyone had missed a girl whose Christian or surname began with B. And Pierre Voirbo continued to laugh at them!

Macé worked day and night on the mystery. During the previous three months eight-four women had been

reported as missing, and after the most careful examination into each case the detective selected three as being most likely to help in the solution of the puzzle. Great was his amazement to discover all three alive and well!

Meanwhile other parts of the body of Bodasse were picked up, though, as Macé was searching for a woman, all these parts were not assumed to belong to the legs. Half a dozen mysteries seemed likely to be manufactured out of one, when Macé had the good fortune to think of submitting the legs to another expert. It was only by chance that he did this, but when Dr. Tardieu unhesitatingly affirmed the legs to be those of a man the detective realized that he had been working on the wrong lines altogether.

The fixing of the sex was a most important and valuable matter, although even now the mystery seemed quite unfathomable. Macé, however, was determined that the murderer should be brought to justice. He meant to devote all his time and ability to the task.

His first examination of the cloth in which the legs had been wrapped before being cast into the well had convinced him that the parcels had been made up by a tailor. They bore certain marks, and the string used as well as the cloth confirmed him in this opinion. He started at the house in the Rue Princesse, making diligent inquiries as to whether a tailor had ever resided there, but was informed that a tailor had never been one of the tenants. The detective was not satisfied, and he got the old woman who acted as concierge to chat to him about the tenants, past and present.

The woman, glad of an audience, entered into a minute account of the habits of the scores of men and women she had met in that house. Most men would have been bored to distraction, and would have ended the interview abruptly, but Macé listened patiently, only interrupting when the old woman casually men-

tioned a girl of the name of Dard, whose claim on fame was that, although she was now on the variety stage, she at one time lived in the house as a humble seamstress.

The detective looked up at the mention of the word "seamstress." Here, then, was somebody who had worked for a tailor. It was but a slight clue, yet it might be worth something.

The old woman gabbled on.

"She gave me a lot of trouble, monsieur," she said, in a croaking voice. "Some one was always bringing her work, and their dirty boots meant that I had to wash down the stairs after them. There was one man, too, who always carried water from the well upstairs for her. He used to spill it, making more work for me."

"What was the name of the man?" asked the officer quietly.

The woman did not know; but before he left the Rue Princesse the detective had established the facts, that Pierre Voirbo was the man's name, and that he had lived close by, and was a tailor by trade.

All trivial clues, and based on conjecture, but Macé considered them worth his trouble. He felt that he was getting on, and when he discovered that Pierre Voirbo had had a friend name Bodasse—Mademoiselle Dard told him this—who had not been seen for a long time, he congratulated himself, recalling the initial on the stocking.

But there yet remained the difficulty of identification. Step by step he delved into Voirbo's life, and simultaneously set going the inquiries that ended in the finding of an old lady who was Bodasse's aunt. She was instantly taken to the Morgue to view the stocking with the initial on it, and, greatly to the delight of the police, immediately identified it as belonging to her nephew. She had the best of reasons for her statement, for she had marked the stockings herself. It appeared that, as Bodasse suffered from cold legs, he had had

the upper part of a woman's stockings joined to the feet of a man's socks. This accounted in a measure for the mistake of the doctors who had certified the human legs to be those of a woman.

The aunt said that she had not seen her nephew for a month, but had not felt alarmed on this account. She was used to his ways, and she illustrated them by relating how once when Bodasse had been unwell he had entered a hospital under a false name so that he might receive care and attention free of cost to himself.

Madame, however, was of further use, as she was able to describe the appearance of Bodasse's friend, Pierre Voirbo. She gave information as to his habits, and Macé quickly had the story of the marriage, the ten thousand francs, the change of address, and all else of importance that concerned Voirbo at his finger-ends. There only remained now the task of proving that Désiré Bodasse had disappeared on a certain date, and the detective went to the apartment house where Bodasse had lived.

Here he met with a most unexpected rebuff. The concierge actually informed him that Monsieur Bodasse was at home at that very moment! The night before she had seen a light in his room, and had noticed his shadow across the blind. If her word was doubted, she added the indisputable evidence that that very morning she had seen Bodasse in the street!

The witness was undeniably respectable, and Macé had to accept her word, and, now that Bodasse was not the victim, he had to pursue his investigations elsewhere; but before he left he deposited a letter with the concierge to be handed over to the old miser when he returned.

But Macé never forgot Pierre Voirbo. The man might be innocent, but there was suspicion enough to justify his being kept in sight. Even if Bodasse was not the man whose legs they had found in the well,

it was just possible that Voirbo had got rid of the miser for the sake of his savings. For that reason he was shadowed, and, when, after a long wait and no sign of Bodasse's return, the police determined to break into his room they discovered that whoever had inhabited it recently it had not been the tenant, for a robbery had taken place.

The mystery became complicated, and yet simpler. Who was the mysterious person who had walked about Bodasse's room, and who had come every night to light the candle? The bed had not been slept in for weeks. It was, therefore, obvious that the thief had not remained there all night.

Macé had one answer only, and that was Pierre Voirbo. The fellow had a very bad record, and his association with the secret police did not earn for him any prestige in the eyes of the law. He was a dissipated loafer, ready to betray friend and foe alike, and Macé was well aware that Voirbo was quite equal to murdering Bodasse for much less than ten thousand francs.

Yet the detective hesitated and it was only after tracing Italian securities belonging to the murdered man to Voirbo's possession that Macé decided to arrest him. Time had been lost in investigating certain clues suggested by Voirbo himself, but there could be little doubt now that they had been merely blinds to distract suspicion from himself. Voirbo must have realized that his position was growing worse every day. He had begun by affecting to despise Macé, but by now he knew that the young officer had proved himself to be a past-master in the art of detection.

By a coincidence the very morning appointed by Macé for Voirbo's arrest saw the suspected man walk into the detective's office, apparently quite unconscious of his fate. He had come, as usual, to offer his opinion on the great mystery, and to accuse more innocent men. Macé kept him waiting for half an hour, and when he

eventually turned to speak to him Voirbo dropped a card from his pocket-book. Macé picked it up for him, and as he did so saw at a single glance that Voirbo had booked a passage on a ship leaving France, and had given a false name.

Ten minutes later Voirbo was under arrest. He swore that he was innocent, and reviled Macé horribly. But the detective was unmoved, although there was much to be accomplished before legal proof was forthcoming.

A visit was paid to Voirbo's wife, an innocent girl, whose heart was broken when she learned the truth. She produced the box where her and her husband's marriage *dots* were kept. Macé opened it, and showed that it was empty. He had robbed his wife as well as Bodasse.

The officer, however, was determined to find the securities Voirbo had stolen from Bodasse's room, and he began a thorough search. When he reached the cellar he found two casks of wine. A strict examination of these revealed a piece of black string tied to a bung above the head of one of the casks. Macé drew it out, and at the end found a thin metal cylinder, neatly soldered. Inside were the missing securities.

Another experiment remained. Voirbo was taken by the police to the room where it was suspected the crime had been committed. Here Macé had him forcibly seated in a chair, and in his presence the detective tested the slope of the floor by pouring water on it. The water instantly dribbled towards the bed, finally settling in a particular spot. The boards were taken up, and congealed blood found.

Macé had argued that during the murder of Bodasse much blood had been spilt, and that some of it must have sunk between the boards at a point where the slope had brought it to a standstill. Voirbo had washed the top of the boards, but had forgotten to wash underneath.

This simple experiment had such an effect upon Voirbo that he instantly confessed to the crime, telling everything without reservation. He did not, however, go to the guillotine, for before his trial, and after one abortive attempt to escape, he cut his throat in prison. The knife with which he took his own life was smuggled into the gaol concealed in a loaf, and although Macé strove valiantly to discover the person who had sent it to Voirbo he never succeeded.

CHAPTER XVII

EMANUEL BARTHÉLEMY

EMANUEL BARTHÉLEMY was a villain of the melodramatic type. Throughout his stormy and adventurous life he appeared to be fully conscious of the fact that he was acting a part. He was theatrical in everything he did; yet the touch of realism was seldom lacking, and he lived and died without fear. He was tall, strongly-built, with a large head, thick hair, an expressive cast of countenance; dark, flashing eyes, and a mouth that was eloquent of the villain's vile, savage temper. Barthélemy was a revolutionary by profession, utterly unprincipled; killing because he loved it as a sport, and the times in which he lived provided him with numerous opportunities to gratify his propensity for murder. His luck was extraordinary until he ran counter to the English law, and, although he escaped the death penalty once in England, on the second occasion he stood his trial for murder he was sentenced and executed.

Barthélemy was a Frenchman, and in the early part of the nineteenth century he took part in many revolutions in France. Louis XVIII, who had been restored to his kingdom by the victory of Waterloo, was finding it difficult to maintain his dynasty, and Barthélemy was one of those who objected to his reign. His objection took the extreme form of shooting dead an unfortunate gendarme in cold blood. This was Barthélemy's first big venture, and he was sentenced to the galleys for life

as a punishment, being lucky to escape with his life. But the murderer did not serve his sentence. In 1830 the political party he favoured succeeded in gaining the upper-hand, and Barthélemy's callous crime was duly considered to be a "political offence," and accordingly he was released, along with thousands of genuine victims of the ruthlessness of the Bourbons.

This was, indeed, a matter for much satisfaction and enjoyment, and Barthélemy, nothing daunted, threw himself into the fray again. He became a sort of unofficial police spy, and for years haunted the cafés where out-at-elbow politicians talked treason and other things.

When a new Chief of Police was appointed the spy lost his situation, and was compelled to join an active organization which was opposed to the ambitions of Louis Napoleon, but in 1848 there was again a revolution, and Louis Napoleon became Napoleon III. The new emperor treated his defeated opponents with ferocious cruelty, and with hundreds of other refugees Barthélemy fled to England to live in exile for the remainder of his life.

From the moment of his arrival in London he took a leading part in the counsels of the French colony. The refugees never abandoned their hope that Napoleon III would be driven from the throne of France. Day after day in poverty they fed on hope and ambition, and Barthélemy was ever the loudest and most swashbuckling of the optimists. It was observed that he was never without funds, although he came of a poor and humble family, but he was so outspoken against the new order of things in his native country that those who whispered that he was a paid spy in Napoleon's service were laughed to scorn.

In the course of time some of the refugees formed a small colony near Englefield Green, Egham, Middlesex, where they established a sort of country-house for the

more respectable of the French exiles—men who really desired to serve their country, and who believed that Napoleon III was ruining it.

By some means Barthélemy found his way into the house at Egham, though his aggressive manner and somewhat uncouth ways were abhorrent to the majority, who were for the most part ex-officers of the French Army and Navy. However, his whole-souled hatred of the Emperor of the French was a passport to their society, and they tolerated him until he became intolerable.

Barthélemy was by nature and instinct a bully, and his favourite "argument" when anyone had the temerity to persist in contradicting him was a blow from his heavy fist. He had a powerful voice, too, and few persons could talk louder and longer than he, but, like all bullies, it was the easiest thing in the world for him to lose his temper.

His readiness to murder on sight, however, made him a hero in the eyes of the riff-raff amongst the refugees, but the better class regarded him with distrust, and only put up with his "eccentricities" because the movement was short of men.

Amongst the colony at Egham there was an ex-naval officer of the name of Cournet. He had served his country well without enriching himself, and in character and disposition he was the reverse of Barthélemy, though Cournet, when provoked, was fierce and short-tempered. Still, he was, as a rule, polite and courteous, and he never originated a quarrel. The numerous revolutions in France had involved him as principal in no fewer than fourteen duels, and on every occasion he had hit his man. He was, therefore, a duellist of renown, and his reputation amongst the exiles was second to none. Barthélemy did not like this, and he resolved to depose Cournet from his leadership. To do this he had to force a duel upon the ex-officer, and one night at Egham, when

Cournet was in his mildest humour, Barthélemy sprang to his feet and swore that the older man had grossly insulted him. In the circumstances he considered that Cournet ought to give him the "usual satisfaction one gentleman owes to another," and that meant a duel. But Barthélemy had forgotten one thing. He had challenged Cournet, who, accordingly, had the right to name the weapons. Now, Cournet was an expert with the pistol, and Barthélemy considered himself equally expert with the sword. As the challenged party, however, Cournet selected pistols, and Barthélemy had to abide by his choice.

The duel was fixed for the following day, and Barthélemy passed a night of terror. He saw himself an easy target for the ex-officer's pistol. In fact, he was perfectly certain that he was going to his death, and he did not want to die.

His partisans meanwhile published abroad amongst the French colony in London the news of the quarrel. It divided them into two camps, each clamorous for its champion's superiority. Bets were made as to the result, and at about the time the duel was to take place a crowd of refugees assembled in Leicester Square to hear the result, just as in the past the race for the Derby has caused crowds to assemble outside the offices of sporting papers to await the name of the winner.

The duel was to determine who was the unofficial leader of the Frenchmen driven into exile by Napoleon III. Cournet's friends, however, were never uneasy as to the result. They knew that their man would and must win, but, unfortunately for their principal, they forgot to take measures to prevent his opponent fighting unfairly. Barthélemy and his intimates actually tampered with his pistol, the weapon which had won for him fourteen similar contests. To lessen the chances of discovery they arranged that Cournet's pistol should go off the moment the trigger was touched, but not in

the direction intended by its owner, and then when Barthélemy presented his weapon at his opponent it would misfire, proving that his pistol was defective too. The misfiring, however, would not forfeit his turn to shoot, and at the second attempt Barthélemy would have no difficulty in making the pistol do his bidding. These were the final arrangements, and they were carried out without a single flaw.

The duellists assembled on Englefield Green, and Cournet won the right to the first shot. To his astonishment and anger the charge in his pistol exploded, and the bullet went harmlessly into the air. The ex-officer was not, however, afraid. He stood rigid whilst Barthélemy levelled his weapon. It misfired, and Barthélemy had to devote a little time to setting it right. Then he remembered that the episode provided him with a chance for a theatrical display. In the best manner of the stage hero he offered to forego his shot if Cournet would consent to continue the duel with swords. The ex-officer instantly rejected the offer, pointing out that if Barthélemy missed he would be entitled to another shot, and then, he grimly added, he would not miss again. Barthélemy knew quite well that his opponent spoke only the barest truth, and without another moment's delay he levelled his pistol and shot Cournet dead.

It was murder, and murder of the most brutal and disgraceful type, but none of the seconds realized that. From first to last they had treated the English law against duelling with the utmost contempt, although they knew that according to the law of the land they were all murderers.

But they regarded themselves as a French colony owning the laws of France only, and, leaving poor Cournet lying stark and stiff, the seconds and Barthélemy went off to London with the intention of celebrating the victory in the Soho Cafés frequented by their fellow-countrymen. However, they were not at

liberty for long, for at Waterloo Station they were met by detectives who took them into custody.

That was in 1852, not many years after the abolition of duelling in England, and, in the circumstances, it was considered wiser by the authorities to place Barthélemy only on trial for the murder of Cournet.

When the case came on at Kingston-on-Thames all the facts mentioned above were cited by the prosecution. It was clearly proved that the contest had not been a duel at all, but a cold-blooded murder on the part of the prisoner and his accomplices. The tampered pistols were produced, and the whole of Barthélemy's villainy laid bare; indeed, Counsel for the prosecution had the easiest of tasks. When the jury retired there was considerable surprise in Court, for no sensible person having heard the evidence should have wished for time to consider his verdict.

The Surrey jury, however, were evidently of opinion that the case "wasn't so simple as it looked," and they spent some time in their private room, eventually returning to astound a packed Court by declaring their verdict to be one of manslaughter. Of course, there was no help for it, and instead of the scaffold Barthélemy received a nominal sentence, and was free again shortly afterwards.

The verdict of the jury—which in plain language meant that, in their opinion, the duel had been fairly fought — greatly enhanced Barthélemy's reputation amongst his countrymen. The better-disposed, however, avoided him, but in the purlieus of Soho it was considered an honour to stand the "hero" of Englefield Green a drink, or, when funds permitted, to offer him dinner. Barthélemy was undisputed king of the bullies now, and he thoroughly enjoyed his triumph. For some months he was lionized, and he did considerable entertaining in return, providing plenty of food and wine, particularly the latter.

It was said that his object was to make certain men speak freely and without thinking, and it was remarkable how well informed the Paris secret police were of the movements and doings of the principal members of the French colony in London about this time. But if Barthélemy was suspected of being their agent there was no proof against him, and the majority of those who knew him unreservedly accepted him as a pure-minded and high-souled patriot.

But gradually Barthélemy's funds ran out, and his borrowing powers showed signs of appreciable decline. The aggressive theatricalism of his manner remained, and he began to be something of a lady-killer. But most of the time he was vulgarly hard-up, and he detested poverty.

Some time in the year 1854 he came into the life of a tall, handsome girl who spoke French with an English accent. Who this girl was has never been discovered. She came on to the stage, as it were, with Barthélemy to take part in a tragedy that was to cost the villain his life, and when the drama was over she was never seen again, although the police of half a dozen countries devoted weeks to searching for her.

The girl was undoubtedly pretty, and she fell in love with Barthélemy, and, according to him, she told him a moving and pathetic story of neglect and ill-treatment by her own father. Her father, she declared, was Mr. George Moore, a well-to-do mineral water manufacturer, who lived at 73, Warren Street, Fitzroy Square, in the dull and dreary neighbourhood of Tottenham Court Road. She said he had promised to make her a comfortable allowance, but had failed to keep his word, and she implored Barthélemy to see that justice was done her.

Whether the murderer's statement was an invention or not we have no means of knowing, but he did call on Mr. Moore, and he took the girl with him, and the visit culminated in a terrible tragedy.

When the servant opened the door to the visitors she noticed that the lady wore a thick mantle and was heavily veiled. They passed upstairs to Mr. Moore's private room and were cordially received, for afterwards three siphons of lemonade were found on a table with three glasses. It may be mentioned that in addition to Mr. Moore and his female servant the only other resident in the house was a young grandchild of the tenant's.

For a few minutes Mr. Moore and his visitors chatted amicably—it was never known what passed between them—Barthélemy gave his version, but he was, amongst other things, a professional liar, and his word cannot be accepted. Mr. Moore undoubtedly received them in the friendliest manner, and he must have had a good reason for doing so. Who was the mysterious girl heavily veiled ? What part did she take in the conversation that led up to the double murder ?

Barthélemy's version was that he politely requested Mr. Moore to deal fairly by his own daughter, whom he intended to make his wife. Of course, as is the custom in France, the Frenchman pointed out that the bride must have a dowry. It was essential to the success of the matrimonial adventure that the wife should be in a position to support her husband. In this case the husband-to-be was the type that does not like work.

Perhaps Barthélemy's statement was true except in one particular. The mysterious lady may not have been the daughter of the manufacturer, but it is credible that Barthélemy may have planned the whole affair in order to blackmail Mr. Moore. No doubt he induced the girl to pose as the injured daughter, and it is conceivable that he coached her into acting the part of the grief-stricken woman whose mother was betrayed and deserted.

Mr. Moore listened to the demand for a settlement on the girl who said she was his daughter and then curtly

declined to pay a penny. Barthélemy threatened him with loss of reputation and its twin, respectability. What would his friends think of him? The older man laughed contemptuously. He was not going to yield to a pair of blackmailers, and he told them to clear out of his house as quickly as possible.

All three by now would be on their feet, Barthélemy and Mr. Moore face to face, the former's eyes flashing, his pose theatrical; and the girl in the background watching, her face hidden by the heavy folds of her veil. The two men would be exchanging angry words, their tempers rising every moment until it would seem that they must be overheard by anybody in the street. But the blackmailer did not wish matters to go as far as that, and he suddenly ended the altercation by smashing Mr. Moore's head in with a blow from a loaded stick.

The unfortunate merchant collapsed in a heap on the floor, but he was by no means unconscious, and he shouted for help until his servant realized that her master was in danger. Throwing open the front door, she screamed in terror until the whole street was roused. A policeman came running towards her, and she gasped out what she knew.

It was obvious that the murderer would not attempt to leave by the front door, and as the only other means of exit was by way of the backyard and over certain walls the officer—Collard by name—who had served in the army and was a very brave man, without thinking of the risk or waiting for assistance, dashed round to the back of the house to intercept the Frenchman and his female companion. A small crowd guarded the front of the building, all of them valiantly prepared to take any risk because there were fifty of them to share it.

Meanwhile Barthélemy, realizing that he had killed Moore, and that the whole neighbourhood was roused, sought desperately for a way of escape. In the crisis he thought only of himself, and, without a word to the

girl, he rushed from the room, darted downstairs and into the yard, climbed a wall at the back and jumped over, to find himself in the arms of the policeman.

The two men rolled and struggled in the road, the officer undismayed by Barthélemy's superiority in height and strength. Collard more than held his own, but Barthélemy, as in the case of his duel with Cournet, was not going to fight fairly. He drew his pistol the moment he was able to release one hand, and with the greatest deliberation fired twice into the body of his opponent.

There were several eye-witnesses of the crime, but no one appears to have attempted to detain the murderer, and Barthélemy would have got away if, just as Collard had fallen back with a groan, more police had not arrived on the scence. The Frenchman was speedily overcome by them and disarmed.

It had been a breathlessly exciting time from beginning to end, and it was not until Barthélemy was being taken to prison that it occurred to his captors to search for his female companion. She had not left the house by the front door, for there had been some one on guard there all the time, and now the police entered, expecting to find her hiding in one of the rooms at the top. Every possible exit was closed before the search began, but despite the protracted efforts of the officers of the law to locate her she was not found. In the room where the interview with Mr. Moore had taken place they discovered lying near the body of the murdered man a woman's mantle, the very one which she had worn when admitted by the servant, as the latter confirmed.

How had she escaped ? If she had gone by the back way she could not have failed to attract the attention of the crowd which had assembled when Collard had tackled Barthélemy. Besides it was almost impossible for a girl to climb the wall unaided.

The authorities quickly discounted the theory of

escape by the back, and in the end it was generally believed that the girl had come prepared for the tragedy, and that she had dressed herself in such a way that by discarding her outer garment she would look absolutely different from the person who had entered with Barthélemy. She must, therefore, have slipped off her cloak, and mingled with the crowd in the hall, unobserved in the general excitement.

It was a most extraordinary feature of the case that the girl was never seen again. Not a trace of her could be found, and the united exertions of the English and Continental police failed to furnish a clue to her identity. It was conjectured that the girl had left England within a dozen hours of Barthélemy's arrest. As the only person who could have told the story of Mr. Moore's murder and the reasons which led up to it, she would have been a most valuable witness, but, as she did not come forward, the tragedy remained enveloped in mystery.

Collard, the brave policeman, was in a dying condition when taken to the hospital, and as his end was approaching it was deemed advisable that he should give his version of the struggle in the presence of Barthélemy. The prisoner was conveyed to the hospital where Collard, barely conscious, denounced him as his assassin.

The Frenchman stood with arms folded, and steadily surveyed Collard's face. It was merely a pose, of course, but it was a carefully prepared one, for Barthélemy never admitted that the unlucky officer had any ground for disliking him! He described the firing of his revolver as an accident, and declared that when a man is trying to make his escape he is justified in using any weapon to further his ends.

The policeman briefly told how he had tried to arrest Barthélemy, and when the statement had been taken down in writing and read over to the dying man Barthélemy was removed.

Collard died a couple of hours later, and when his death was notified the authorities decided to place Barthélemy on trial for the murder of the policeman, and not for the crime of having killed Mr. Moore. The reason for this was that no one except the girl who had vanished had seen the murder of Mr. Moore, whereas there were several persons who had been spectators of the second murder.

The police now began to investigate Barthélemy's life, and by the time the prisoner came to stand his trial at the Old Bailey were certain that the motive for the murder of Mr. Moore was robbery and nothing else. The mineral water manufacturer was in the habit of keeping a fairly large sum of money in the house, and Barthélemy had evidently brought his female companion with the object of using her as a bait to draw Mr. Moore's attention away from himself. If the merchant should become engrossed in the girl Barthélemy would be able to slip out of the room unobserved and commit the theft. This was what he intended should happen, but apparently Mr. Moore's suspicions had been unexpectedly aroused before Barthélemy could act, and in a vain effort to save himself, and also to obtain the plunder, Barthélemy had committed murder, only to find himself compelled to take a second human life. This was the official version of a tragic interview, but, as it was based entirely on conjecture, it was not universally accepted.

To say that Emanuel Barthélemy enjoyed his trial for murder at the Old Bailey is not an exaggeration. He revelled in the role of first villain in a piece which drew all London. As the hero of the duel at Egham and the subsequent trial at Kingston, he was already something of a celebrity. His achievements in France as a revolutionary were the subject of common gossip, and that they did not belie the character of the man was obvious from the attitude of studied bravado he

maintained throughout the trial. He always referred to the double murder as "the affair," and while he politely expressed regret that "the affair" should have caused inconvenience to the policeman Collard, yet he could not in justice to himself, admit that there was anything in his conduct deserving of censure. He had only fired in self-defence, and no one ought to blame him for that.

The decision of the authorities to make the murder of Collard the only charge provided the defence with their one chance. Counsel for the prisoner ingeniously argued that at the worst Barthélemy had been guilty of manslaughter only. He had fired at Collard with the object of facilitating his escape. There had been no quarrel between the prisoner and his victim; they were perfect strangers, and the policeman's death was really an accident, as Barthélemy had only intended to injure him.

Barthélemy held his head high all through the trial, and there was plenty of the "flashing eye" business and gesture of contempt interludes to enliven the proceedings. He took up the attitude of one who does not fear death, and, considering that this was his third trial for murder and that he had escaped twice, he had some reason for assuming that he was not meant to die upon the scaffold.

The Old Bailey jury, however, proved somewhat more sophisticated than the Kingston jury, and, without hesitation, they rejected the subtle theories of counsel for the defence. The fact could never be obscured that Collard had been murdered by Barthélemy, and their immediate and unanimous verdict was that the prisoner was guilty. The usual sentence of death followed, and Barthélemy received it with a mocking bow. He did not care, and he was not afraid.

He knew that there was no chance of a reprieve, and while he awaited execution he conducted himself quietly,

giving no trouble to the prison authorities. He declared himself an atheist and declined to receive a priest of his own nationality. When the chaplain managed to speak a few words of admonition he answered with a laugh :

" I don't want God to save my soul. If there is a God let him save my body by opening the prison doors. That's all I ask."

As the time grew shorter, however, Barthélemy became anxious about something, but it was not his soul. Sending for the Governor he declared that the only cause of uneasiness was a fear lest after his death his clothes should be exhibited at Madame Tussaud's ! The Governor reassured him by promising him that they would not, and once more the convict's mind was at rest, and he faced eternity calmly.

Calcraft was the executioner, and Barthélemy made his acquaintance with a cynical smile.

" I have one thing to ask of you—do it quickly," he said, on the morning of his execution, January 22nd, 1855.

The grim-visaged executioner nodded. Barthélemy was undoubtedly a type of murderer not often met with even by a man with Calcraft's experience.

When the Frenchman stepped on to the scaffold he surveyed the crowd with a cool stare, slightly contemptuous of their interest and excitement. In his opinion death was not worth all this display. He was treating it with the indifference it merited.

" Now I shall know the secret," he said, as the rope was placed around his neck. A few minutes later he was dead.

CHAPTER XVIII

WILLIAM PARSONS

THE so-called "gentleman criminal" has flourished in all ages and in all climes, and there have been many remarkable scoundrels who have utilized their social position to rob their fellows. One of the most notorious was William Parsons, the son of a baronet, and the nephew of a duchess, who was educated at Eton, served as an officer both in the army and navy, and, after a career during which he experimented in every kind of fraud, ended on the gallows.

Parsons began early in life to plunder and swindle, and his first victim was his own brother. When the two boys set out for Eton each possessed a five-guinea piece, given them by their aunt, the Duchess of Northumberland, and when William had spent his he stole his brother's. The theft was discovered, and the thief received such a severe thrashing that he had to keep to his bed for a fortnight. It was a punishment which would have convinced most persons that "the way of transgressors is hard," but Parsons quickly forgot when the pain had gone and began to thieve again. The head master of Eton received many complaints from boys whose pockets had been picked. Gold and silver watches and other jewellery disappeared as if by magic, and despite the precautions taken to shadow Parsons the thefts continued. He was thrashed again and again, but all to no effect, and, finally, it was decided to remove him.

He had an uncle living at Epsom, named Captain Dutton, and to him he was sent. There was no publicity about the " removal "—which was really expulsion —for Sir William Parsons, the boy's father, was highly esteemed, and everything was done to spare his feelings. Captain Dutton received the young prodigal with much kindness, generously ascribing his escapades at the great public school to a boy's natural propensities for fun. " Boys will be boys," said the officer, and prepared to give his headstrong nephew the run of his house.

It was understood in the family that Parsons was to inherit the estate of his uncle, who was by no means a poor man. But Parsons was not one to wait for dead men's shoes.

From the moment he arrived at Epsom he plunged into every kind of vice. The gallant captain had an account at a jeweller's, and Parsons, learning this, ordered an immense quantity of plate, which he disposed of in London for a tenth of its value. If any money was left lying about the house the young thief's fingers immediately closed round it. In vain his uncle censured and forgave. Parsons was irreclaimable, and eventually Captain Dutton kicked him into the street, and closed his door against him for ever.

A family conference was now held, and it came to the conclusion that Parsons had better be sent to sea, and accordingly he took a voyage in H.M.S. *Drake* to the West Indies, holding the rank of a midshipman. As he was so well related, he was given a good time by his fellow-officers, and although there were rumours concerning him on board he managed to return home with his name still on the books of the ship, and without being in irons. This was, undoubtedly, a remarkable accomplishment for him. But long before his return he had decided that he did not care for the cramped life of a sailor. He wanted to live in the very best style, and have his fling in the gayest circles in London. He

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had already acquired a fondness for gambling, and on his arrival in England from the West Indies he took all his savings to a gambling hell in London, and in a few hours lost every penny.

He did not despair, for he was aware that there was an idea in his family that he had reformed. His period of service in the navy had convinced his relations that he had indeed turned over a new leaf. The Duchess of Northumberland was staying at her London mansion, and Parsons, utterly penniless, paid her a visit, hoping to induce his good-natured aunt to come to his financial rescue. With apparent contrition he apologized for the indiscretions of his youth, and swore that he now found virtue more attractive than vice. It ended, of course, in an appeal for funds, and the duchess handed him five hundred pounds so that he might appear in society as befitted his relationship to her. That night the five hundred pounds became nearly two thousand as the result of the most daring gambling on Parsons' part. He took the most reckless chances, and every time came out on top. He was naturally wildly delighted. Here was the quickest and easiest road to fortune, and he persuaded himself that in a few weeks he would be worth many thousands of pounds. But the sequel was absurdly conventional. Parson was cleaned out within a couple of days.

Each time he became " dead broke " he called on the Duchess of Northumberland, but with each succeeding visit her presents of money became uncomfortably less, and he had to supplement her grants in aid by purloining various small articles of jewellery which he found on her dressing-table. The duchess, however, possessed so much jewellery that the thefts passed unnoticed until one evening, whilst chatting confidentally with her in her boudoir, he slipped into his pocket a miniature set in gold, which her Grace valued highly—so highly, indeed, that when she discovered her loss she offered

a reward of five hundred pounds for its recovery. It was a purely sentimental valuation, but it placed Parsons in a most awkward position. Five hundred pounds would have been a godsend to him, and yet he dared not surrender the miniature, for he was well aware that his aunt would never forgive the theft, and, accordingly the young thief was compelled to sell it to a jeweller of doubtful reputation, who gave him fifty pounds for it.

Having for the time being exhausted his resources in London, Parsons was driven to the desperate expedient of going home. The family seat was just outside the town of Nottingham, but he found it so dull that he became a regular frequenter of the assembly rooms at Buxton. A few minor thefts provided funds for a week, and the son of the well-known Nottinghamshire baronet was received everywhere. No one thought of suspecting him of being a thief, and when he stole a pair of shoes with gold buckles, and disposed of the gold to a jeweller in Nottingham, Sir William averted exposure when the gold buckles were traced to his son by negotiating in private with the original owner. For the sake of the heart-broken father the victim of the theft did not prosecute, and young Parsons was bundled off to London, Sir William having no further use for him.

Perhaps if Parsons had not been saved from punishment so often he would not have adopted crime as a profession. But to a person of his temperament the game must have appeared to be worth more than the proverbial candle, because when he won he was paid, and when he lost there was always a kind-hearted relative or friend to pay for him. He was not at all embarrassed by his narrow escape at Nottingham. It was only a minor episode in a career in which he had come unscathed out of many tight corners.

On his return to London he happened to meet a lady some ten years older than himself, but whose burden

of years was eased by the possession of a considerable fortune. She was not bad-looking, and being without near relatives she was an easy victim to the unscrupulous fortune-hunter. When Parsons was introduced to her as the son of Sir William Parsons, and the nephew of the Duchess of Northumberland, the socially-ambitious lady simply " threw herself at him."

She longed to shine in high society, and the moment Parsons understood her weakness he played up to it for all he was worth. He promised to introduce her to his aunt, and swore that her Grace would instantly fall in love with her and chaperon her, for, of course, anyone who entered the charmed portals of society vouched for by the Duchess of Northumberland would encounter no difficulties in her way.

The lady accepted all his statements without demur, but she proved somewhat coy whenever money was mentioned, and Parsons had to ask her to marry him before she would consent to advance him a portion of her fortune.

They became engaged in secret, Parsons pointing out that it must be kept quiet until he had time to approach his aunt, the duchess, diplomatically and break the news to her, for the lady was the daughter of a man who had made his money in trade, and in those days that was considered a bar to entry into society. She was satisfied with his explanation, and she poured thousands of pounds into her " lover's " keeping to hold in trust for her. At the same time he was making love to a girl whom he had met at his aunt's house, and he actually bought her presents with the money he had extracted from the too-confiding lady who fondly imagined that she would soon be his wife.

When he had robbed her of every penny it was possible to obtain without arousing the suspicions of her guardians, Parsons, realizing that it would be better for his health and comfort to vanish from London for some

months, returned to the navy and secured an appointment on H.M.S. *Romney*.

There were a gallant set of officers on board, not too well endowed with this world's goods, but quite willing to hazard what they possessed at the gaming-table. Well aware of this, Parsons, who deemed it only proper to combine business with pleasure, took with him some marked cards and loaded dice. Every evening the officers played, and from the very beginning Parsons won. Cynically contemptuous of the intelligence of his opponents, he did not condescend to the usual trick of allowing them to win now and then. He simply took all he could get until it became painfully obvious that the only man on board who never lost was William Parsons, and it was generally agreed that there could be only one reason for that.

The captain accordingly took Parsons aside and informed him that they all had decided not to play with him in future. The scoundrel shrugged his shoulders, but, of course, had to accept the decision, for the captain was the autocrat of the ship. But worse was to follow, for before the voyage was at an end the officers added to their first decision another one which prevented anyone addressing Parsons except when duty compelled.

The studied contempt of his brother-officers did not affect him. He had long since lost all sense of decency, and his only anxiety was that there might be unnecessary delay before he reached land again.

Once more he found himself in London, and determined never to enter the navy again. The standard of honour at sea was too high for him, and the blunt sailors had a way of expressing their opinions which was decidedly uncomfortable.

He plunged again into the life of a gambler, but with all his experience could not win except on those rare occasions when he was able to persuade the company

to play with the dice or cards he produced. Whenever this occurred he swept the board, but he was by now too well known, and it happened that it was only in the semi-public gambling saloon where trickery was impossible that he was allowed to play, because his fellow-gamblers knew that the dice could not be loaded or the cards marked.

One night he lost five thousand pounds to an army officer, and as he had only fifteen hundred pounds on him paid that amount on account. The officer, who was somewhat the worse for drink, shortly afterwards left the house, and Parsons followed him, robbed him of the money, returned, and lost it again at cards. It was a favourite trick of his to rob those he paid, and the astonishing thing about it all is that he was never detected.

Gamblers were fond of drinking and few of them were sober by midnight. Parsons, however, kept his wits about him, for he owed so much that he could not afford to handicap himself as the others did. And yet when he won a considerable sum he never had the sense to stop. On three occasions his winnings exceeded two thousand pounds, and within twenty-four hours he was penniless again.

Meanwhile he could live fairly comfortable on credit as it was known that the Duchess of Northumberland had named him for a large sum in her will, and it was expected that her Grace's decease would free him from all his liabilities.

Now, Parsons had been disinherited once—by his uncle, Captain Dutton, of Epsom—and that ought to have been a warning to him, but he never learned even from his misfortunes, and he was destined to receive nothing from his aunt.

It all came about owing to the sudden necessity for him to pay a visit abroad. London was swarming with his creditors, and to avoid them he went to Jamaica.

But money was scarce there, too, and he found the local traders had a not unnatural preference for cash when it came to bargaining, and Parsons accordingly forged a letter, purporting to be signed by his aunt, guaranteeing to be responsible for any sum up to seventy pounds which her nephew might borrow.

When he had raised the sum mentioned, Parsons decamped, and some time afterwards the duchess was rendered furious by a demand from the Jamaican merchant for repayment. She disowned the forgery at once, and cut Parsons' name out of her will. She had intended to bequeath him twenty-five thousand pounds, and now she transferred the legacy to his sister, well aware that her family would take every precaution to prevent the "black sheep" touching any of it.

But the disinherited rascal was unperturbed, and it seemed that he had checkmated misfortune when he met and married within a very short time a young lady with a fortune in her own right of twelve thousand pounds, with more to come.

The newly-married couple set up in a luxuriously-furnished house in Poland Street, in the West End of London, and Parsons, anxious to obtain a better standing in society, purchased a commission in a crack regiment. He did not, however, lose his fondness for the gaming-tables, and when his wife let him have four thousand pounds he gaily informed her a fortnight afterwards that he was without a penny. She came to the rescue by allowing him to mortgage her securities, which he did thoroughly, actually raising money twice on the same documents.

Parsons had purchased a commission in the army without any intention of ever doing any fighting, but greatly to his annoyance his regiment was ordered to Flanders, where there was every chance of his making the acquaintance of powder and shot. His family were delighted, hoping that active service would "steady"

him. But the seasoned criminal disappointed them again, and in Flanders he perpetrated frauds specially suited to the situation he found himself in.

When it was necessary to reclothe the whole of his regiment, Parsons was fortunate enough to secure the contract, and on behalf of the regiment he bought a great quantity of cloth. By some means he managed to get it all to London, and there he disposed of it at about half the rate he had bought it at, and in a few days had spent all the money in riotous living.

This offence was, however, of too serious a nature to pass unnoticed, and in due course it was reported to the Commander-in-Chief. The Duke of Cumberland, who was then the head of the British Army, dismissed him from the service and confiscated the sum of money he had paid for his commission, ordering it to be devoted to replacing part of the losses sustained by his innumerable frauds.

It is astonishing that more drastic measures were not adopted, but no doubt the wealthy and powerful Northumberland family brought all their influence to bear. Besides, Sir William Parsons, the thief's father, was well known in Court circles, and it may have been that it was on his account that the career of his son was not brought to a swift conclusion at the hands of the common hangman.

Now that he was a cashiered officer he could no longer, of course, associate with decent people. His companions from henceforth were dishonest servants and professional criminals. The lowest class gambling-houses began to know him well, and he was addressed affectionately by individuals who would not have been tolerated by his father's domestics.

Mrs. Parsons had not unnaturally returned home to her parents, who had informed her husband that if he attempted to molest her they would shoot him like a dog, and, as Parsons knew that there was no more

money to be had from her, he was only too glad to be saved the trouble and expense of keeping her.

But he was not the man to live meanly, and he formed many plans, the success of which would set him up again as a gentleman of means and leisure. Every decent door was closed against him, and he had to depend now wholly and solely on fraud to provide him with food and shelter.

Parsons took another house and furnished it entirely on credit. The plate was massive and costly, and of such value that the goldsmith who supplied it was the first of the tradesmen to get anxious about the payment of his account. But when, shortly after delivering it, he nervously called at the house in Panton Square, he was surprised to find it uninhabited. There was no sign of life about it, and inquiries confirmed his impression that the owner had gone away for a time. But he could see that the furniture remained, and, therefore, he was not greatly perturbed. The gentry were fond of going into the country, and as Parsons had boasted of his estate in Nottinghamshire the goldsmith returned to his shop satisfied that he would be paid one day.

Other creditors rang at the front door, and failed to gain admission, and when their suspicions were aroused they kept a watch on the house, but they never caught a glimpse of their debtor. Yet Parsons was actually living there. He used to enter and leave by a small door in the stable-yard, and he seldom went out unprovided with a piece of plate or some other portable article which was destined to find its way into a pawnbroker's shop.

The comedy was brought to a sudden termination by the impatience of the landlord, who was desirous of seeing his rent. The law, which kept the other creditors at bay, permitted him to force an entrance, but when he did he discovered that he was too late. Parsons had disposed of the furniture, leaving only the heavy curtains

to act—in every sense of the word—as a blind. The creditors never received a single penny.

By now Parsons had a friend, a certain man named Wilson, who had been a footman until dishonesty led to his dismissal. Wilson had served for some years in a family of position, and he had managed to pick up some of their mannerisms, which he imagined justified him in thinking that he could pose as a gentleman himself. He was tall and good-looking, and could talk glibly of several well-known personages as though they were personal friends, whereas the truth was that he had only waited on them.

In conjunction with this scoundrel, Parsons devised a scheme whereby he would be able to recover some of the twenty-five thousand pounds which he had lost by the forgery of his aunt's name. The money was now bound to come to his sister, who was generally referred to as the "wealthy Miss Parsons," and, as at the time we are speaking of marriage gave the husband instant possession of his wife's fortune, Parsons suggested that Wilson should carry off his sister, forcibly marry her, and then pay over ten thousand pounds of his wife's fortune to him.

It was a pretty idea, and the ex-footman entered into it with enthusiasm. He knew that Miss Parsons' entire fortune was considerably more than twenty-five thousand pounds, and he would have paid double William Parsons' commission if the latter had insisted on more generous terms.

The preliminary plans were settled in an old public-house in the Haymarket, not far from the lodgings accupied by the girl, who did not suspect that her own brother wished to sell her to a debased ruffian. Elopements were common enough in those days, and the forcible abduction of an heiress was considered legitimate sport in certain circles. William knew his sister's movements, and there seemed no reason to fear failure

when he bought over Miss Parsons' maid with a promise to pay her five hundred pounds when the marriage had taken place. The sum offered was an immense fortune to a lady's maid, and she eagerly accepted the bribe.

All that remained now was to hire the coach and the swiftest horses, arrange for the unscrupulous clergyman to be ready at an out-of-the-way spot, and then to take the unsuspecting girl to her doom.

From first to last Parsons exhibited much cunning in this affair, and had it not been for the carelessness of his confederate his plan might have succeeded.

But Wilson lost his head when Parsons persuaded him to believe that marriage to his wealthy sister was certain. The ex-footman could not keep his mouth closed, and he drew attention to himself by his extravagant purchases for the great event. He was buying half a dozen expensive "ruffled shirts" in a West End shop one day when, in the presence of several customers, he boasted of his forthcoming marriage to "the great heiress, Miss Parsons."

The small audience stared when they heard this, and envied the well-dressed "gentleman" his good fortune, but, unhappily for him, just as he was speaking a lady had entered who knew him. She overheard his reference to Miss Parsons, and she glanced at him with more than ordinary interest. Great was her astonishment when she recognized her ex-footman, Wilson, the man she had discharged for dishonesty.

Steps were instantly taken to acquaint Miss Parsons with the statements Wilson was making about her, and she thought it prudent to change her lodgings, and to hire an ex-pugilist to follow and protect her wherever she went. But there was no danger from the moment Wilson had made that very stupid and incautious remark for the conspirators got frightened and separated, though not before Parsons had savagely attacked Wilson for his indiscretion. The result of the attack

was the disfigurement of the footman's face for the rest of his life.

Although he was now always short of ready money, Parsons took good care to see that his wardrobe was in first-rate condition. He never dressed shabbily, always appearing as a man of fashion. London, however, was not so remunerative as it had been: his character was too well known, and the set he mixed in was too poor to be worth the robbing. He, therefore, decided on a sort of provincial tour, and he went down to Bath with the intention of finding a vain and silly girl with money, who would be attracted by his appearance and his titled relations.

The baronet's son speedily found a victim in the daughter of a well-to-do doctor. He represented himself to be a bachelor—of course, the truth was that his wife was still alive—anxious to marry and settle down in quiet luxury, as befitted his birth. The girl readily responded to his honeyed words, and in her father's house the engagement took place, and was approved of by the doctor, who had heard of Sir William Parsons, Bart., of Nottingham.

Parsons began to borrow. In hundreds at first and then in thousands, and very soon the girl's private fortune of three thousand pounds, which she had inherited from her mother, had been lent to Parsons, and lost by him in the gaming-houses.

Her father advanced more, and when he had drained the family dry Parsons announced that he was called away to see his father to arrange for his marriage, and he took his departure from Bath with the cordial good wishes of the doctor and his daughter, who were destined neither to see him nor their money again.

From Bath he went to Clifton. It was then a small village where a few of the wealthy Bristol merchants had country-houses. He arrived in the early summer, and speedily got an introduction to a rich shipowner

who had two daughters. Parsons discovered that the two girls were wildly jealous of each other, and he thereupon made each one the object of his attentions without letting either know that she had a rival. There was plenty of money in the family, but on the first occasion Parsons delicately hinted that a loan of two hundred pounds would be acceptable the hard-headed old merchant only advised him to write to his father, offering to bear the expense of the communication.

This was not what Parsons wanted, and he determined to use the girls to extract the money from their father, whom he termed "the old miser." Accordingly, he took the elder girl out for a walk, and boldly explained that he was temporarily without means owing to a family lawsuit, and he hinted that if she wished to marry him she must help to relieve his pecuniary embarrassment. The girl promised to do her best, and, confident that she would keep her promise not to divulge to her father or sister what he had said, he met the younger girl, and put his situation before her in similar terms.

A few days later he found that the two girls were actually vying with one another as to which of them could find the most money for her lover, unaware that they were both referring to the same individual.

By some extraordinary means they got over five thousand pounds for him, and Parsons supplemented it with a forged order purporting to be signed by the girl's father, ordering his manager to pay the bearer a thousand pounds. Parsons presented the order in person, received the money, packed his belongings, and the same night left for London. When the fraud was discovered the old man was for instant exposure, but on reflection, and persuaded by his daughters, he decided that the disgrace and ridicule that would follow for them when Parsons was arrested was too big a price to pay for revenge, and they never published the story of their foolishness and gullibility.

But Parsons' end was approaching. His good fortune could not last for ever, and he met his match in a country girl, who resented his advances after she had found him with another woman and refused to act as his accomplice in the passing of counterfeit banknotes. She denounced him in a temper, and he was arrested. It was characteristic of the fellow that when in prison awaiting trial he should rob a fellow-prisoner of his small stock of cash.

For the offence of possessing imitation banknotes Parsons was transported, but he managed to earn the good graces of the governor of the colony whither he was sent, and he was back again in England within two years, paying the expenses of his journey by an audacious robbery at the expense of the official who had sheltered him in his house.

And now having tried nearly every variety and form of crime, and being without funds, Parsons turned highwayman as a last desperate resource.

It was the most precarious of all professions, but there was ever the temptation of netting a large sum of money. His first essay resulted in a gain of about eighty pounds, and his second ten pounds less. The money was not much use to Parsons, and he would have abandoned the profession there and then had he not heard that a certain nobleman intended to carry a thousand pounds from London to a house a few miles to the north of Turnham Green.

Parsons resolved to waylay the coach and capture the money, but his plans were upset by his own arrest, and after five months in prison at Newgate he was executed on February 11th, 1750, the king rejecting a petition presented to him by the prisoner's powerful and influential relations.

CHAPTER XIX

ADAM WORTH

WHEN the American Civil War was going none too well for the Northern States, President Lincoln, who was determined not to introduce conscription until he was absolutely compelled to, offered a special bounty of one thousand dollars (about £200) to every fit man who would volunteer to serve "for the duration of the war." We all know now that even the generous bounty failed to solve the recruiting problem, and that conscription had eventually to be resorted to, but for a time that thousand dollar offer elicited numerous responses, and amongst the men it brought into the army was a young clerk of the name of Adam Worth.

Worth was just under twenty, smooth-tongued, clever, self-willed, born to command, and, if physically small, his muscles were as strong as fine steel, while the dark, glittering eyes and the prominent nose were traces of his German-Jewish ancestry. He received his thousand dollars, donned the uniform of the Northern Army, and then deserted, to re-enlist later in another regiment and receive another bounty.

Such was the beginning of the greatest and most successful criminal career the world has ever known. In his school days Adam Worth had been cheated by another and a bigger boy offering him a new penny for two old ones. When the child was told of the loss he had sustained he resolved he would never be "done"

again, and he certainly recovered those two pennies millions of times before he died.

Does crime pay ? Those who really know are certain that it does not, but there are a few who doubt. Well, here is the story of a man who stole in all quite £500,000, and who must have averaged close on twenty thousand pounds a year during his active life. We shall see what happened to him.

Satisfied for a while with the second bounty, Adam Worth took part in several of the later battles of the great Civil War. There is no record that he distinguished himself, but, on the other hand, he performed his duties satisfactorily, and participated in the rejoicings which followed the triumph of the North. Along with thousands of others, he was discharged from the army when hostilities ceased, and as one of the men who had fought for his country was assured of remunerative employment. But Adam Worth's ideas of money were too big to be honest, and he quickly drifted into the society of thieves. He turned pickpocket, and achieved some very neat thefts. Then he took part in a robbery from a bank. He directed the operations, and their success confirmed what most of his associates were slowly realizing—that Adam Worth and success went hand in hand. Gradually they began to treat him with respect ; afterwards they looked up to him as their leader. New methods were needed, and Worth supplied them.

"It's just as easy to steal a hundred thousand dollars as a tenth of that sum," he said to his criminal associates. "The risk is just as great. We'll, therefore, go out for big money always."

He introduced the system of utilizing the proceeds, or part of them, of one robbery to help to bring off the next. Hitherto the average thief was accustomed to spend his ill-gotten gains in dissipation, and then look about for a way of filling his empty pockets. Adam

ADAM WORTH

Worth changed all that. He realized that crime must be capitalized if it was to be successful and to pay large dividends. One robbery, for example, brought in about ten thousand dollars, and he distributed only half of this amongst his followers, the balance being held in reserve for another bank burglary, and the reserve was frequently added to.

Worth's foresight was justified immediately. He had despatched confederates all over the United States to seek out likely banks to rob ; and, when one of them reported that the Boyston Bank, in Boston, was just the thing they were looking for, Worth journeyed from New York to inspect. He was delighted with what he saw, for it seemed to him the bank was built purposely for him. With proper care it would be the easiest job of his life, and he saw to it that every care was taken to ensure success.

Next door to the Boyston Bank was a barber's shop. It did a good business, and had Worth not possessed considerable monetary reserves he would never have been able to induce the proprietor to sell out. The crook, however, offered him a generous sum down " on the nail," explaining that he was the representative of a New York company which was going to introduce into Boston a patent bitters which would sweep all other patent bitters out of the market. The money and the explanation were accepted, and within a few days the necessary alterations had been made.

The shop window was packed with bottles—which prevented anyone seeing into the shop—and a wooden partition at the end of the shop effectively screened that part from observation should a stray " customer " appear. One of the gang, dressed as a shop assistant, was always on view during the day, but at night he assisted Adam Worth and two other men to dig a tunnel under the shop and into the bank next door. For a week they worked, taking particular care that no trace

of their operations could be seen. The excavated earth was carefully piled up behind the wooden partition and watched as though it was gold. Thousands of Bostonians passed the window of the New Patent Bitters Co. unconscious of the fact that one of the most sensational bank robberies of the century was being carried out, for when the gang had finished their tunnel they entered the vaults of the bank, broke open three safes, and gathered a rich harvest of gold and silver and notes, worth in all close on one million dollars.

The four burglars at once fled to New York, and there they divided the spoils, later scattering when they heard that the Boston police were after them. One of the thieves went to Ireland, another to Canada, Worth and the fourth member of the gang, Bullard, sailed for England to open up a new and sensational chapter in the story of crime.

Of course, they could not go by their own names. Bullard called himself Charles Wells, and Adam Worth took the name of Harry Raymond. He made it notorious before he finished with it.

The two American crooks put up at one of the best hotels in Liverpool, intending to take things lazily for a few weeks, but Adam Worth's restless nature would not permit him to keep his hands off other people's property even when he was possessed of forty thousand pounds—his share, after expenses had been paid, of the raid on the bank at Boston. His confederate fell in love with a barmaid at the hotel, and spent most of his time in her company, leaving Worth to wander about the city, ever on the look out for a likely crib to crack.

It was typical of the man that he should regard Charles Bullard's love-making with contempt, because it caused him to neglect business. Bullard could see no reason why they should take any more risks until their money was gone, but Worth looked upon crime as a profession which must be pursued day after day,

no matter how large the profits. Anyhow, he left Bullard to himself. Whenever possible Worth preferred to work on his own, for that meant more for him.

At last he found what he wanted. There was a pawnbroker's shop in one of the principal streets of the city which, judging by its window display, must be bulging with jewellery. Adam Worth decided to burgle it, and to secure a wax impression of the key of the front door he called three times within a fortnight to pawn certain articles. He was disguised, of course, for he had to engage the pawnbroker in conversation in order to get an opportunity to press the bit of wax concealed in his left palm against the key, which the pawnbroker sometimes left lying on his counter. On the occasion of his third visit Worth secured the right impression and it cost the unfortunate tradesman twenty-five thousand pounds, for that was the value of the goods missing when he arrived at his establishment one morning and found that it had been entered the previous night.

Worth now decided to visit London. Liverpool was not big enough for a man of his capacity, and, in addition, he was growing rather tired of Bullard, who had married the beautiful barmaid. He advised the newly-married pair to make Paris their headquarters, and they took his advice. Then Worth came to London and rented a costly flat in the centre of Piccadilly. He had now over sixty thousand pounds in hand, all of which he devoted to his profession.

His flat became a regular meeting-place for all the noted thieves of England and the Continent, as well as those select crooks who came from America to interview the greatest of them all. Worth had his own staff of well-trained servants, all of whom could be trusted, and with his large funds he was always in a position to finance any big job. Thieves came to him for advice and help. Was there a bank official to be

bribed or a skeleton key to be made? Adam Worth solved both problems. Did a particular job require the services of an expert burglar or forger? Adam Worth had a large supply of either on hand. He knew where to find the right man for every job, and in return for his services he received a goodly percentage of the profits.

The London police were amazed at the long series of burglaries which began with Adam Worth's arrival in London. Each one of them was carried out so neatly that they were plainly the work of a master. But who was the master? Could it be possible that the American gentleman who lived such an open life in the very centre of fashionable London was actually the leader of a gang of burglars? If he was, surely one of his gang would betray him? The police could obtain no proof, and Adam Worth kept them so busy investigating his depredations that they had very little time to devote to his personality.

He planned the robbery of the French mail between Boulogne and Folkestone that resulted in a loss to the Post Office of thirty thousand pounds. Adam Worth provided keys to fit the vans and the boxes containing the registered parcels, and on another occasion actually sent a couple of expert train thieves down to Dover with an exact duplicate of the registered mail bag, everything being on a par with the original, even to the minute figures on the seal. That robbery brought in about twenty thousand pounds, and it was only one of many. Indeed, every case Adam Worth touched turned to gold. Everybody who knew him regarded him as their mascot, and his own personality did the rest.

He was generous to his followers in good and bad times. When any of them were down on their luck they came to Worth, and were helped with presents of money running into hundreds of pounds. In this

way he bought them body and soul, keeping a register of their names and abilities, and calling them up for active service when he required them.

All this went on from that luxurious flat in Piccadilly. Now and then Adam Worth took a trip abroad, intending to rest, but he always came back to London with more money than he had gone away with. It was quite impossible for him to resist temptation.

Amongst Worth's most trusted followers was an American, Charles Becker, the very greatest forger who ever lived, not even excepting the famous "Jim the Penman." Worth retained Becker as his principal forger, and at his London headquarters the master criminal got Becker and three other men together, where a great campaign was planned. Coutts's Bank was selected as the principal victim, and Becker, with marvellous skill, forged a number of letters of credit purporting to be issued by the London bank.

Worth supplied the four men with plenty of money to begin their tour, advancing sufficient cash until they could pass their letters of credit, when they would return the money with interest. The gang got as far as Smyrna without mishap, and all seemed to be going well. But one evening when they were gambling at their hotel they were pounced upon by the local police and taken to prison. They had no chance at their trial, and they were sentenced to seven years' penal servitude, and lodged in a horrible prison at Constantinople to serve their time. But Charles Becker, not to mention the others, was too valuable to Adam Worth to be allowed to pass seven long years in a Turkish prison. Worth disappeared from Piccadilly for a time, turning up in Constantinople in the guise of an American millionaire making the grand tour. A few months passed, and Adam Worth's friends were still on the worse side of the prison walls, but the master-criminal was only taking his own time to achieve success. Had he

hurried he might have bungled his plans. Turkish officials are easy to bribe, but the right ones must be selected, and everything must be done with dignified slowness.

Worth had thousands of pounds in his trunk, and these he distributed judiciously amongst the heads of the police and the principal official of the prison.

When his task was completed he departed from Constantinople, and the same evening three out of the four members of his gang escaped from prison. The fourth man happened to be weak and ill, and he could not get away in time. The three convicts endured many hardships following their escape. They had to go into Asia in order to reach Europe by a roundabout route, but while travelling through Asia Minor they had the misfortune to fall into the hands of bandits, who held them to ransom, although it was apparent that they were penniless convicts. The brigands, however, permitted one of them, Joe Elliott, to go to England and communicate with their friends, and a month was allowed for the payment of the ransoms. Of course, Elliott went straight to Adam Worth's flat in Piccadilly, and when he told his story Worth drew a cheque for a couple of thousand pounds, and sent Elliott with the cash to release his comrades. A few weeks later they were all back in London again to take a " breather " before resuming their attacks on the banks.

All this leads up to the theft of the famous Gainsborough picture, " The Duchess of Devonshire," for if Charles Becker had not escaped from the Turkish prison the circumstances would not have arisen which inspired Adam Worth to steal it. Becker, soon after his return to London, forged a series of cheques, the proceeds of which were taken to the Continent to be exchanged for French and German banknotes. But one of the men commissioned by Worth to act as his agent in the disposal of the notes was arrested and

brought back to England to face the serious charge of forgery. This person, who passed under the name of Thompson, was an intimate friend of his chief's, and Worth swore that he would get him released on bail pending his trial. Of course, the American crook would then have decamped, and if necessary Adam Worth would have recompensed the man who went bail for the money he would forfeit.

But the English law requires a householder of good reputation to bail a prisoner, and Worth was not in a position to command the services of one. There was nothing to do but to see if he could not compel a wealthy and well-known Londoner to bail out Thompson.

He was racking his brains for a way out of the impasse when happening to be walking down Bond Street with an English thief, Jack Phillips, known to his intimates as "Junka" they were impeded by a crowd of fashionable folk who were entering an art gallery. The two thieves inquired what was the attraction which had filled Bond Street with carriages, and they were told that the famous Gainsborough was on view in Messrs. Agnew's art gallery, they having bought it a few days previously for the sum of ten thousand guineas.

"Why, that's the very thing, Junka," whispered Worth, with glittering eyes. "We'll steal the picture and offer to return it to Agnew's if they will stand bail for Thompson. They won't dare refuse, for they'll realize that we could easily destroy the picture if they did."

Phillips argued, for the plan struck him as preposterous, but Worth insisted, and he brought Joe Elliott, the man who had been captured with the other escaped convicts by the Turkish bandits, into the conspiracy.

Three nights later there was a fog, and Phillips, Elliott, and Worth went to Bond Street, where Phillips, who was very tall, stood under the window of the room

where the picture was, and Adam Worth, who was small and wiry, climbed on to his shoulders, and in a few moments was in the gallery. It was the work of a couple of minutes to cut the picture from its frame, roll it up, and pass it down to Phillips, while Joe Elliott kept guard fifty yards away to notify the movements of the policeman on duty.

The programme was carried out without the slightest hitch, and the next morning London and the world was provided with one of its greatest sensations. That was May 26, 1876, and despite the efforts of the best brains of Scotland Yard, backed by a huge reward, Messrs. Agnew did not see their valuable picture again for twenty-six years. Then Adam Worth, a prematurely aged man, broken in health and penniless, returned the picture through the Pinkertons for part of the original reward. He wanted the money to provide his two children with a home and to ensure a little peace for himself before he died.

But a great deal happened between that May morning in 1876 and Adam Worth's sudden death in 1902. The theft of the picture proved useless, because Thompson, the prisoner, was released and allowed to leave the country owing to a flaw in the indictment. He had been extradited on the wrong charge and had, therefore, to be set at liberty. When he heard this Worth had the canvas concealed in the false bottom of a trunk and taken to America, and during the ensuing quarter of a century it rested in furniture depositories in Boston, New York and Brooklyn. There it remained whilst Adam Worth rose to the greatest heights a professional criminal has ever reached, and there it was when he fell into the depths.

Two years after the theft of the Gainsborough, Worth, with several trusted followers, robbed the express train between Calais and Paris of bonds worth thirty thousand pounds. The money was needed, as by now Worth

had bought a beautiful steam yacht, which he called the *Shamrock*, and in addition to maintaining it and a crew of twenty men, he turned racehorse owner and took out a licence to race in England. He was at his zenith now, and hundreds of persons who met the well-dressed, spruce little man with the engaging personality never suspected for a moment that they were in the presence of the King of Crooks.

Adam Worth adapted himself to any circumstances that arose, but behind the smooth face there was an evil soul, always planning attacks on society, always on the lookout to thieve and burgle and forge. And the stately yacht rode at anchor in the harbour at Cowes, and its owner raced his horses, gave dinner-parties, went to the opera, and lived the life of a man whose wealth frees him from many of the sordid cares of life.

The marvel of it is that it lasted as long as it did. Adam Worth was always taking risks. Frequently he would go for a pleasure trip in his yacht and every port he touched had reason to regret the visit, for it meant that some one lost thousands of pounds. Each visit was celebrated with a burglary or a successful raid on a local bank by means of a forged cheque.

His feats were many, and it is difficult to know which of them to select here, for volumes could be written about the master-criminal. On one occasion he was carrying twenty thousand pounds' worth of diamonds—stolen, of course—to America to sell, when a number of thefts were committed on board the ship. Worth was innocent, for he never stooped to robbing cabins, but he was afraid lest he should be searched and his stolen goods found upon him. He, therefore, left the ship at the earliest possible moment, and boarded a train for a distant part of America. But even then he left nothing to chance, and he concealed his booty in the carriage, deciding it was too dangerous to carry about.

Sure enough he was arrested and, when he had proved his innocence of complicity in the thefts aboard ship, was released. Then he set to work to track down the carriage in which he had hidden his diamonds, and after some trouble found it in a siding. Late that night he forced his way into the carriage, and recovered the valuables. It is safe to say that not another thief in the world would have carried out such a programme so successfully.

But it was in the diamond fields of South Africa that Adam Worth, alias, Harry Raymond, was at his best. He was driven to visit Africa by the uncomfortable fact that the English police were watching him very closely; indeed, they had gone so far as to place a detective outside his house day and night to report every visitor. This was unbearable, and Worth, who required more money, sent for an old friend, Charles King, and together they travelled to Cape Town.

Worth was after a really big thing this time, and he told his companion that he was not going to be satisfied with anything under one hundred thousand pounds. His first plan was to take what he wanted by simply turning highwayman. He discovered that every week a consignment of diamonds was sent from the De Beer mines in a coach, which was driven by an armed Boer, assisted by a guard. Along with King and another man, Worth delivered the attack, but the old Boer driver was not to be cowed, and he drove them off with his rifle.

The failure of the plan sent King out of the country in a panic, and the other man decamped too. But Adam Worth was not dismayed. He knew that if he persevered he must win in the long run, and now, although he would have to act entirely on his own, he became convinced that there was another and a better way to rob the weekly parcel of valuable stones.

As has been described, the diamonds were brought

from the mines to the Cape Town post office in a coach, but they were not kept in the post office longer than it took to make a note of the address, for every week the steamer was waiting in the harbour to convey the precious packet to England. It was, however, absolutely necessary to the success of Worth's plans for that parcel to remain at least one night in the post office in Cape Town. How could he manage that ? It was a stiff problem to tackle.

He provided himself with the duplicates of the post office keys, particularly of the safes in which the registered letters were kept. This in itself was a great achievement, but it would take too long to tell the full story of how he ingratiated himself with the postmaster and secured the wax impressions. That was only half the work. It was more important that he should prevent the coach reaching Cape Town in time for the steamer. Worth went over the route taken by the coach, and he was delighted to find a spot where it had to cross a deep stream by means of a ferry. This was the crook's opportunity. He hid in the neighbourhood until it was dark, and then he cut the rope which held the ferry to the bank. When the coach arrived from the diamond fields the ferry had floated a long way down the stream, and when it was recovered and the stream crossed the driver must have known that only by a miracle could he catch the mail that week. The miracle did not happen, and the steamer had already sailed when the coach arrived.

The parcel of diamonds had to be left in the safe at the post office, to which Adam Worth had a perfect key, and when he had first opened the safe he had seen twenty thousands pounds' worth and more of valuables, and had refused to touch them. What was the use of twenty thousand pounds to a man who wanted five times that amount, and who could obtain it by waiting a few days ?

The authorities did not regard the delay to the coach as serious, and no extra guard was placed upon the safe in which the parcel reposed, and at the proper time Worth had only to enter the building, open the safe, and take out a collection of diamonds worth a hundred and fifty thousand pounds. It was a theft which can be described as a masterpiece in its own line.

Once in possession of the diamonds Adam Worth was in no hurry to convert them into cash. He knew that everybody leaving the country would be under suspicion, and so he trekked inland, posing as a merchant in ostrich feathers. Before he left Cape Town he buried the diamonds, and it was many weeks ere he and a confederate—who came from America purposely to help to smuggle the diamonds out of the country—returned to recover them. When it was deemed safe Worth and his friend took them to Australia and eventually to England.

This "scoop" did not lessen Worth's appetite for plunder. Other burglaries were quickly organized, and Charles Becker was busily employed forging cheques on banks in England and France. One of these resulted in a friend of Worth's being arrested and convicted, and Worth himself avenged his confederate by robbing the banker who had given evidence of so much money as to bring about his ruin.

But the day came when Adam Worth was caught. He and another thief were robbing the registered mail in Belgium when Worth's comrade made a stupid mistake, and his chief was arrested. He received a sentence of seven years' penal servitude, and he served the time, although he was twice offered his freedom if he would reveal the whereabouts of the Gainsborough he had stolen several years previously. Worth, however, would not trust the word of those who made the offers, and it was not until he emerged from prison, wrecked in health and financially crippled, that he

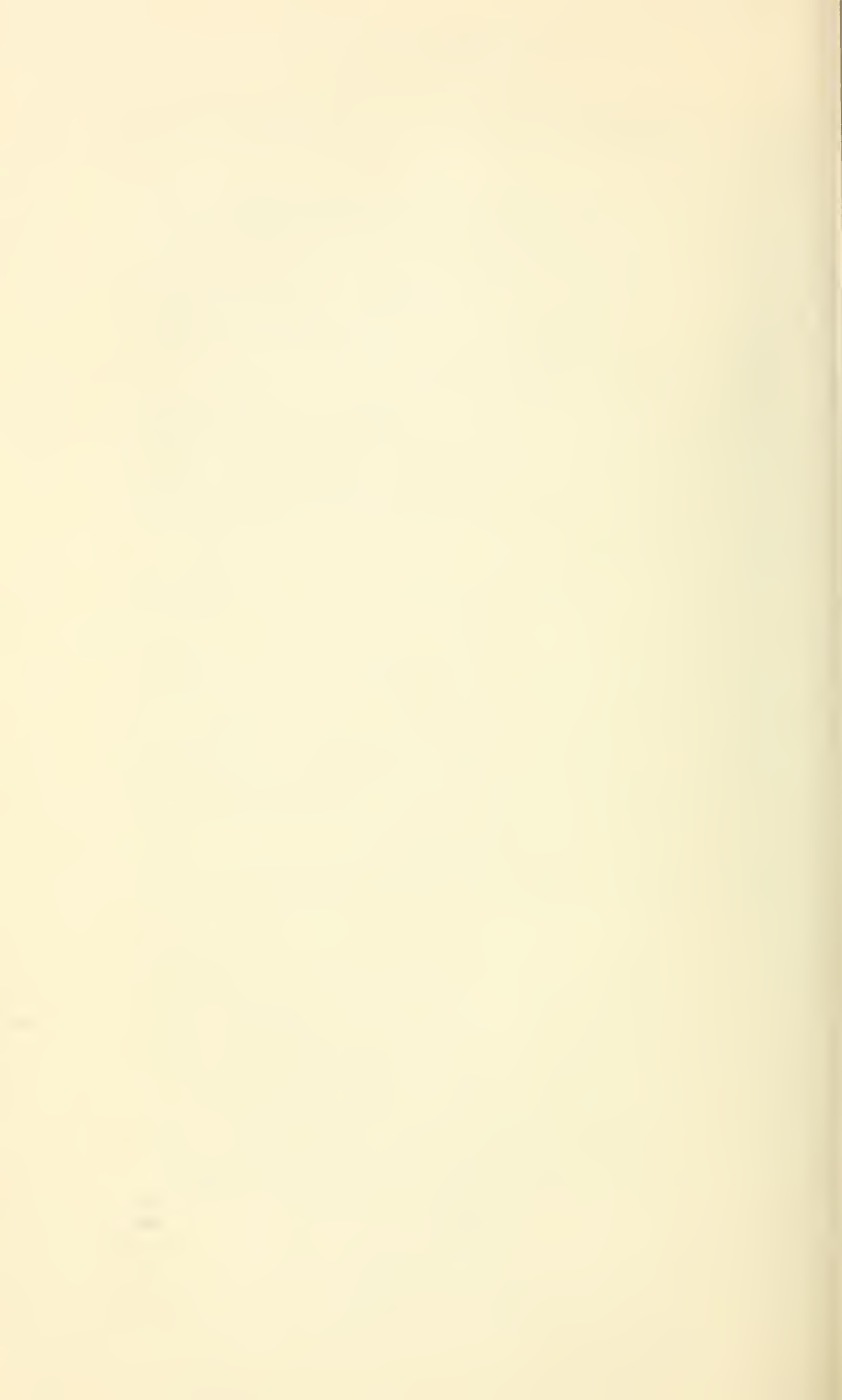
turned to the Pinkertons, the famous American detective agency, and consented on terms to surrender the famous painting.

He was then approaching the sixties, and there can be no doubt that he had lost his nerve. For nearly forty years he had warred against society with only one defeat, but that defeat finished him. With the money the Agnews paid for the return of the picture, " Little Adam "—as he was affectionately known to his friends—provided his family with a home.

All his life he had been devoted to his relatives, and he worshipped his wife and children. They never knew that he was a professional criminal, and even to-day they are unaware of the real character of the husband and parent beside whose grave they mourned nineteen years ago.

Adam Worth had his good points, for his motto was that thieves should be honest amongst themselves. He never resorted to violence, and he never betrayed a friend, and we know that he was good to his family according to his own lights. He was a danger to society, however, and all we can wonder at now is that he was permitted to plunder it with impunity for so many years. But genius will overcome any difficulty, and the genius of Adam Worth was something which raise his doings out of the commonplace.

Yet, when all is said and done, the King of Crooks realized before he died that crime does not pay.



CHAPTER XX

THE SECRET PRINCESS OF POSEN

A PRETTY, fair-haired girl, who looked not more than eighteen, sat in a forlorn attitude in the park near the Imperial Palace at Posen. Passers-by glanced at her curiously, and whenever she lifted her soft blue eyes they saw that they were wet with tears. When a stranger paused as if to address her the girl instantly froze, and there was something about her small mouth that caused him to change his mind.

Presently, however, a tall, elderly man of distinguished appearance came strolling towards her, and simultaneously the girl's tears began to fall faster than ever. Sobs were choking her when he came opposite her, and he would have had to be hard-hearted to have passed on without noticing her. But Count Renenski, millionaire, patriot and statesman, had a generous disposition, and the sight of beauty in distress claimed his sympathy at once. With a courteous bow he asked if he could be of assistance, and the girl, surveying him through her tears, made room for him on the seat. She was so timid and frightened and appealing that she seemed like a gazelle, and the count, a noted philanthropist, thought he had never seen so dainty a vision.

" I am Count Renenski," he said kindly. " Won't you let me help you ? I do not suppose you have ever heard of me before, but I think I can be of use."

She laid one small hand on his arm.

" You have a face that tells me I can trust you,"

she murmured, her form still trembling, "and I will tell you all, but first you must swear not to reveal what I am going to say."

He gave the promise readily, his curiosity piqued by her tragic manner of expressing herself.

"I feel safe with you," she whispered in a caressing voice. "God has been good to me this morning. I have found a friend, count. When I tell you that my name is Anna Schnieder it will convey nothing to you, because that is only the name I was given to conceal my true position. I was comparatively happy until two years ago. Until then I thought I was merely the daughter of an honest shoemaker and his wife, though I was puzzled that they were able to give me a first-class education. Then I discovered that some one was providing everything for me. Judge of my astonishment when by accident I learned that that some one was His Majesty the German Emperor."

The count stiffened perceptibly, and his eyes distended. He was one of the leaders of the National Polish party which demanded to be freed from the intolerable tyranny of Germany. He had been one of the Polish aristocrats who had refused to attend the Kaiser's receptions in Posen, the capital of Prussian Poland, and he was keenly interested in all that referred to the man he and his countrymen loathed.

"Yes, go on," he said under his breath. "You can confide in me. I never betray a trust."

"I am sure you never have," she said, giving him another appealing glance. "But to proceed. I am naturally quick-witted, and I was able to put two and two together. I began to recall incidents of my childhood, and after a while I got my foster-mother—for that is all she is—to answer certain questions. Within an hour I knew the truth. I, Anna Schnieder, was in reality Her Royal Highness Princess Anna of Prussia, the daughter of His Majesty the Emperor."

Count Renenski started to his feet. Was the girl fooling him? He sharply scrutinized her features, but she bore it bravely. There was certainly something aristocratic about her. He sank on to the seat again, and indicated he was listening.

"The year before the Kaiser married the Kaiserin he was in Posen"—the count ejaculated that he remembered it—"and there he met and fell in love with a Polish girl of the name of Vera Savanoff."

"The Savanoffs!" cried the count in amazement. "Why, I knew the family well. And there was a girl too—several girls, in fact. I have often wondered what became of them. But proceed, mademoiselle," he added with a courteous inclination of the head. "I will not interrupt you again."

Encouraged by his attention, the girl proceeded to amplify her story. She told of a mysterious marriage in a Polish church—long since destroyed—between the then Prince William of Prussia and Vera Savanoff, and how after the ceremony the girl had disappeared. She had been taken to a castle in the Black Forest, and there the Kaiser had visited her regularly for five years. Then a child had been born, and that child was christened Anna Schnieder. Meanwhile William had married a Princess of the Blood Royal, and was the father of a family, but no one suspected that in the sight of God the Kaiser had only one legal wife, and that she was Vera Savanoff. When after the birth of her daughter poor Vera died mysteriously the Kaiser suddenly lost all interest in his first romance, and Anna hinted that William II connived at her death.

It was an amazing story, and would have been unbelievable had she not produced proofs. The count was still trying to understand it all when she thrust into his hands a bundle of papers which she had carried concealed under her blouse.

"These are some of the proofs," she said frankly.

"I know it is difficult to credit my story—sometimes I can hardly believe it myself."

The papers included a certificate of marriage between Prince William of Prussia and Vera Savanoff, signed by the officiating priest, but without witnesses' signatures. Another certificate showed when Anna Schnieder had come into the world. But the most important documents were two letters from the Crown Prince of Germany couched in intimate terms. One of them contained the sentence, "I am sorry Father treated you so badly. Surely he must know it was not your fault."

The letters completely convinced the count of the genuineness of the fair damsel's amazing and romantic story. He knew the handwriting of the Crown Prince of Germany very well, for he had lately been in correspondence on the subject of the treatment of Polish conscripts in the Prussian Army. The prince, who was then doing all he could to gain popularity, and so weaken his father's position, had planned to win the sympathies of the Poles by a pretence of affection for them, and Count Renenski, as an influential aristocrat, had been selected by him as the person most likely to further his objects.

When he had once more reaffirmed his promise not to reveal what she had told him, Anna consented to accompany him to his residence. She hastily dried her eyes, and her recovery was marvellously quick, for she was all smiles five minutes later as they were leaving the park. She had insisted upon the count taking care of the papers for her.

"I am only a weak girl," she said with delightful humility, "and when the Kaiser learns that I know who I am he will set his agents to work to try to get hold of my papers. But I am so happy now that I have found a brave friend."

The count owned a magnificent castle in Posen, where,

as he was a bachelor, his widowed sister kept house for him. The lady received Anna graciously, and Anna on her part was relieved to find that the count's relative was a small, inoffensive creature, who evidently thought that her brother could do no wrong. When she saw him pay the utmost deference to the young lady he regarded as a princess, she followed suit, and Anna became a sort of uncrowned queen of the mansion.

It was not surprising that the count, who was over sixty, should soon begin to feel tenderly disposed towards his protegé. She was heart and soul a Pole, she told him.

" I want to vindicate my mother's fair name," she cried, " and she was a daughter of Poland, the land I love."

When the count asked her to marry him she gave a tearful consent, but only on the condition that when she had the right to call him husband he would help her to prove to the world that she was the legitimate daughter of the German Emperor. Count Renenski willingly agreed, because he saw in the affair a chance to discredit the Kaiser.

It was arranged that the count should settle a sum equivalent to fifty thousand pounds on his bride, and he instructed his lawyers accordingly. He also gave her jewellery worth thousands of pounds, much of it family heirlooms, and he placed a thousand pounds to her credit at a bank in Posen. He declared that the most fascinating of sights was Anna in the act of drawing a cheque, for she revelled in the unusual luxury, and her joy was childlike and beautifully innocent and infectious.

The wedding was fixed for the tenth of July, 1910, and a week before Anna went to stay with a female cousin of the count's at a house twenty miles from Posen. It was arranged that they were not to meet again until she arrived in the state carriage belonging to the family

at the ancient church where the ceremony was to be performed.

But Count Renenski never saw her again. On the eighth of July she told her hostess that she was going to drive into Posen to do some shopping, and as the old lady was indisposed she went alone. That night she took train to a remote German village, and with her travelled the family jewels of the Renenskis and the sum of three thousand pounds, most of which she had borrowed from the count's cousin.

It was some little time before the disappointed and enraged nobleman would confess that he had been swindled by as clever a German adventuress as had ever appeared in Poland, but it is doubtful if he ever learnt that Anna Schnieder had purposely planted herself on that seat in the park to wait until he came along, or that she had looked up his history and had discovered amongst other things that he was in the habit of taking a morning constitutional, and, knowing how generous and impulsive he was, had invented a yarn about an ill-treated Polish mother and a brutal German father, and, as the count's hatred of the Kaiser was common knowledge, she had not found it difficult to fool him.

He came to the conclusion that all the papers she had shown him were forgeries, but, as a matter of fact, only the certificates came under that head, for the letters from the Crown Prince were genuine enough, though the words he had used bore quite a different interpretation to that which Renenski had given them. Anna had been at one time a waitress in a certain Bonn beer-house where she had made the acquaintance of the Crown Prince, and had become one of his earliest friends. He had taken her about the country, and had even affronted Berlin society by appearing with her in a box at the Apollo Theatre, and drawing attention to both of them by shouting at the performers. The

scandal had been reported to the Kaiser, who had ordered Police-President von Jagow to make short work of Anna, and the police had accordingly forcibly carried her away from the hotel where she was stopping, and had threatened her with imprisonment if ever she went near the prince again.

Anna had, of course, written to the Crown Prince, and he had in response sent her the two letters which she found so useful in her career as a brazen-faced adventuress. For the prince had regaled her with many stories of his father's escapades in the days when the present ex-Kaiser was a very young man, and Anna, being clever and unscrupulous, had treasured up memories of these anecdotes with a view to making use of them later.

Count Renenski made a guarded complaint to Berlin, and when the matter was referred back to Posen, and the German Chief of Police there called upon him to obtain fuller particulars, the count, having in the meantime remembered that he had pledged his word in writing to Anna that on their marriage he would start an anti-Prussian campaign, thought it more discreet to withdraw the charge, although by so doing he lost the only chance he had of recovering the very valuable Renenski family jewels.

By now Anna was at Homburg in the guise of a wealthy German baroness who had just lost her husband. She spent the count's money freely, and her jewellery was the talk of the place. She certainly looked exquisitely lovely in black, and her dainty youthfulness made her a welcome addition to the society of the famous German resort. It was impossible to imagine for a moment that such an innocent-looking being could utter a lie, and, as she had plenty of ready cash, there was never any suspicion that she was an adventuress.

Men were such fools where a pretty face was con-

cerned! How she laughed as she recalled the count's love-making! But sometimes she sighed, too, because she knew that he would have made a good husband. Anna, however, had a husband already, a great, lumbering person with an enormous appetite, who followed the occupation of a brewer's drayman!

That was the reason why she had fled from Posen before the marriage day. She had often had reason to curse the mischance that had caused her when a village maiden to accept Ernst Rippelmayer, but she had not then known what she was capable of, and Rippelmayer owned his own cottage, and was considered a safe and steady man.

It happened that amongst the hotel guests was a Colonel Bernstorff, a distant relative of the late German Ambassador to the United States. He paid Anna some attention, because, having only a small income, he was desperately in need of financial reinforcements, having wasted the fortune his first wife had brought him.

In order to impress Anna, or the Baroness von Hotenfeld, as she called herself, he pretended to be very well off, and whenever she accompanied him to any entertainment he spent money with the freedom of a man who has more than he knows what to do with. They soon proceeded from the formally polite stage to the confidential, and before the Homburg season was over it was understood that they were engaged.

For various reasons Colonel Bernstorff could not marry at once, but it was agreed that six months later they should become man and wife. This suited Anna all right, and when she parted from him she went on to Crefeld, where she intended to see if she could swindle some of the officers of the garrison out of a big amount. She wanted it badly, for she had been afraid to ask the colonel for a loan, because she had no desire to give him a chance to break their engagement. Bernstorff

belonged to a well-known German family. He was a member of several exclusive Berlin clubs, and he had the entrée to the Royal Palaces. She knew that when they were married she would be presented at Court, and once that happened there was no reason why she should not, with the secret aid of her old friend, the Crown Prince, become quite a personage in society.

But meanwhile she must " raise the wind " somehow, and so to Crefeld she went, where at the time a battalion of the Prussian Guards was stationed. It included amongst its officers several rich young noodles, and it was to lay siege to the latter that Anna, with her most fascinating gowns, started for the town.

She undoubtedly had an alluring manner, and shortly after her arrival her apartments were frequented by several of the officers. Anna, still maintaining her bogus rank of baroness, provided all sorts of gambling games, in which she declined to take part, declaring that she had never played for money in her life. Occasionally she would back the luck of a young officer, and when he won she was rewarded with a pair of gloves or some similar trifle. Anna would accept the gift with as much gratitude and delight as though it were a thousand guinea bracelet, but all the time she was waiting to achieve her object. The officer she was " shadowing " had just come of age, and she knew that he had a large amount at his bankers which he was doing his best to get rid of.

One night he lost all his ready money—a considerable sum—and as he was anxious to go on Anna lent him a thousand marks (fifty pounds) with which to continue. But his luck was terrible, and eventually he rose from the table thousands to the bad. It was nothing to him, however, and after a touching interview with " adorable Anna," as he called her, he was assisted to his carriage by his servant. Next day he called and left a cheque for the amount the impostor had lent him.

The adventuress had been waiting for this, and she cleverly altered the carelessly-drawn cheque from a thousand marks to one hundred thousand. It was promptly honoured by the Berlin bank, and as soon as Anna had the whole amount she prepared for flight. But an hour before her train was due to leave she was arrested at the station. The Berlin bank had on second thoughts telegraphed to the officer asking for confirmation of the cheque. He had replied denying that he had recently drawn one for such a large amount, and Anna's capture followed.

It was not very difficult for the police to find proof of many of her swindles. She had imposed upon scores of tradespeople, and had obtained a lot of money by false pretences from elderly and infatuated Huns. A very heavy indictment was presented against her, but it was for the forgery of the cheque that the judge sentenced her to three years' penal servitude.

Anna was stunned by her misadventure. She had hitherto been so successful as an impostor that it seemed as if she was immune from failure, but now she was a convict, destined to pass three long years in a horrible German prison, and when she heard that she was to be sent to the women's convict establishment at West Gradenz she nearly collapsed, for it was one of the worst, the severe discipline frequently driving weak-minded convicts insane. There was no appeal, however, and one grey October morning she found herself handcuffed to another convict, and passing through the gloomy portals of the ghastly prison. It was a rule that each new-comer should be inspected by the governor, and Anna was in due course brought before that all-powerful official, the man who was to have the power of life and death over her until she had served her sentence.

She had been roughly thrust into a bare hall with white-washed walls, and she was staring ferociously at the hard earth floor when her companion whispered

that the governor was there. Then she started up, and was petrified when she realized that the governor was Colonel Bernstorff.

He recognized her instantly, but with admirable self-control gave no sign. His appointment to this important post had been unexpected, and he had striven to obtain it so that he might be able to marry his fascinating sweetheart at once. And now she was a convict in his charge!

He tried to ignore her, but somehow she had completely won his heart, and a few days after her arrival he made a pretext for seeing her alone in his office. By now Anna, who had guessed that he would not be able to resist her, had compiled a moving story of persecution at the hands of her father, the Kaiser, and when the governor asked for an explanation she confessed, amid sobs, that she was the victim of a political intrigue. Except for certain additions occasioned by the new situation, it was the story she had duped Count Renenski with.

The governor was persuaded to believe her, despite the fact that he had in the prison archives the papers relating to her conviction, and he used all his family's influence to get her a pardon. When this was granted he married her, and, resigning his position, took her for a long tour, Anna declaring that they need not bother about money, as she would shortly receive a million from her real father, the Kaiser. But the honeymoon lasted only three weeks, for Anna was arrested on a charge of bigamy, and it was only when Colonel Bernstorff was confronted by her real husband that he admitted he had made a fool of himself. He thereupon abandoned the impostor to her fate, and she was eventually sent back to complete her original sentence, plus one of five years, for bigamy, and when the war ended she was still in the gloomy prison of West Gradenz.

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